

MENSTRUAL CARE FOR PERSONS WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES

Laís S. Costa e colaboradores



Guidance for people who menstruate,
healthcare workers, carers and families



ENSP



FIOCRUZ

Menstrual care is necessary for the health and safety of people who menstruate, for example cisgender girls and women, transgender men and non-binary people.

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SOME KEY FACTS ABOUT MENSTRUATION

Menstruation occurs for +/- 40 years of life.

The menstrual cycle lasts for 28 to 32 days. Menstruation, which is the bleeding stage, takes place once per month and may last from 3 to 7 days.

The main feature is vaginal bleeding.

It may also cause:

- **Fluid retention and swelling.**
- **Menstrual cramps** (like an abdominal pain).
- **Headache and/or back pain.**
- **Sadness, euphoria and mood swings.**

ATTENTION!

- **Persons with epilepsy may have fits linked to the menstrual cycle.**
- **Persons with diabetes may need to check their blood sugar more regularly during their menstruation.**

Observing the body's changes during the menstrual cycle can help you understand how it works, allowing you to protect your health and feel good.

MENSTRUATION AS AN EVERYDAY PROCESS

Each person lives menstruation in their own way, influenced by socioeconomic, cultural, functional, gender, racial, psychological issues.

Our culture views the universal body as one without disability.



We call this **BODY NORMATIVITY***. It contributes to the barriers persons with disabilities face when caring for their menstruation with dignity and infringes their sexual and reproductive rights.

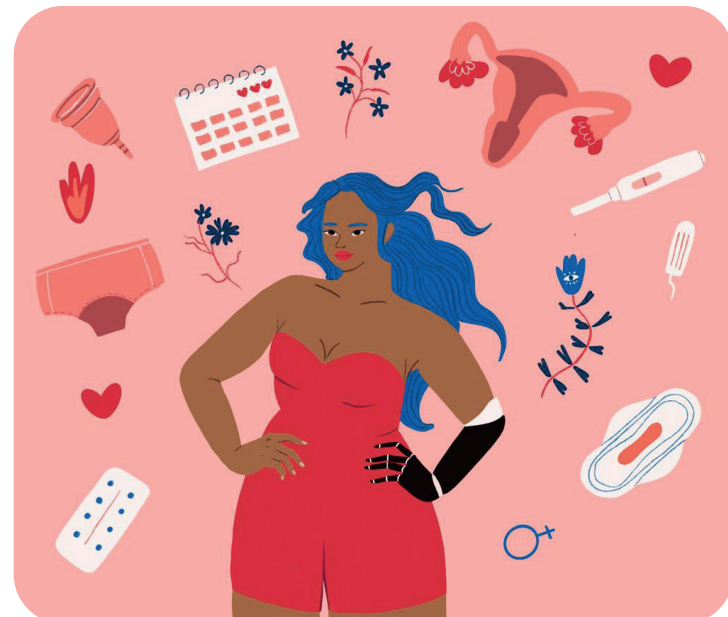
*** Persons with disabilities are considered abnormal, deviant and inferior, which leads to their characteristics being made invisible.**

SAFE MENSTRUAL CARE

It happens when a person who menstruates learns to care for themselves.

It is necessary to avoid:

- Infection risks.
- Embarrassment.
- Vulnerability to abuse, etc.



Talk to your family healthcare workers for guidance on how to acquire and use proper sanitary pads for menstrual care.

MENSTRUAL POVERTY

Menstrual poverty **mainly affects vulnerable people** who live in precarious conditions. It is **defined by a lack of access to:**

- **Sanitary facilities** in a useable state.
- **Sanitary pads** to contain menstrual flows.
- Reliable and safe **support and information**.



Consider which menstrual care resources are compatible and accessible for each person.

MENSTRUAL EDUCATION

Menstrual care affects health and well-being. **It's in everyone's interest**, regardless of disability, gender, race or ethnicity.

In Brazil, **90% of people who menstruate** begin to deal with **menstrual care while still in school**.

The disregard for menstrual education is related to the myth that it is something dirty, shameful or linked to reproduction.

Young persons with disabilities face extra barriers **due to lack of accessibility and taboos which infantilize them**.



Unequal access to menstrual care results in the most vulnerable children being removed from school.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES WHO MENSTRUATE

Stigmas make menstrual care infeasible for persons with disabilities (PwD) and result in:

- **Lack of access** to reliable information, pads and medicines.
- **Lack of access and accessibility** to use sanitary facilities.
- Sanitary products with an **unsuitable shape and/or texture**.
- **Lack of proper support** to change sanitary pads.
- **Interruption of the menstrual cycle or sterilization without consent** (especially persons with intellectual disability).
- **Overprotection and infringement of sexual and reproductive rights**.
- **Disrespect** for people's protagonism.

STERILIZATION WITHOUT CONSENT IS A CRIME.
When in Brazil, report it by dialling 100.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES WHO MENSTRUATE

Stigmas involved in menstrual care result in (cont.):

- **Little knowledge production** regarding menstrual health.
- **Low-quality information** at health services.
- **Increased VULNERABILITY, VIOLENCE and SUFFERING.**

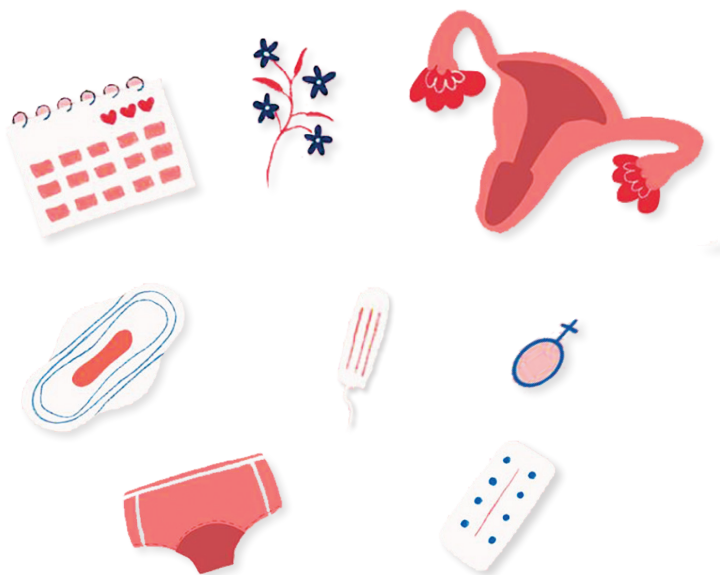
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- **Manage their menstrual cycle in a dignified and healthy way.**
- **Access to information and resources to maintain sexual health and hygiene.**
- **Access sexual healthcare without any sort of violence or embarrassment.**

In Brazil, the Protection and Promotion of Menstrual Health and Dignity Program provides free sanitary pads to individuals in vulnerable situations.

TIPS FOR MENSTRUAL CARE

- Choose suitable textures and shapes for pads to avoid rashes, discomfort and sensory overload.
- Regular changes can help avoid leaks.
- Take extra clothes and pads and a bag for dirty clothes when you go out.



Monitoring the menstrual cycle using symptoms, calendars or app is important for people's safety and presence in social spaces.

PROMOTING MENSTRUAL DIGNITY

- Persons with disabilities have the **right to decide about their sexuality, their bodies and their menstrual care** (self-determination).
- Some people need support to manage their menstrual care.
- Menstrual education and support aid self-determination.
- Ethical care means listening to and respecting people's choices.
- Take into account people's experience in care practices.
- The myth that persons with disabilities don't menstruate results in a lack of guidance and accessible spaces and materials.
- Menstrual education initiatives **must have persons with disabilities represented**.
- Use accessible material and produce accessible informative content which can also be understood by persons with intellectual disability.
- Menstrual education **must involve families**.

Fight menstrual body normativity: encourage research and development of menstrual products that take account of human diversity!

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES WHO MENSTRUATE AND SEXUAL HEALTH

Sexual health is a state of physical, social and emotional well-being linked to sexuality. It presupposes menstrual care and dignity.

For more information about sexual rights and health, go to:
<https://www.arca.fiocruz.br/handle/icict/55749>
or access the QR Code below:



All persons, with or without disabilities, have the right to sexual health.

DESIRABLE INITIATIVES

- Develop the **communication skills** of healthcare workers.
- **Empower families** to support people who menstruate with safe and dignified care.
- Review the **access and accessibility protocols** for **sanitary facilities** in schools and other public spaces.
- **Produce accessible material** in simple language, descriptions of images, sign language, etc.



Make sure to consult persons with disabilities on initiatives to realize the right to menstrual care.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MAKE INCLUSIVE MENSTRUAL CARE A REALITY

SOCIAL SUPPORT	KNOWLEDGE AND ABILITIES	FACILITIES AND SERVICES
Actions to fight stigmas and discrimination : act on social changes and accessible communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Production of accessible information. → Representation of persons with disabilities in informative material. 	<p>Access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Adequate infrastructure. → Accessible and safe facilities. → Information and support.
Health at School Programme - HSP*: inclusion of schools in educational processes for menstrual care , which also involve children and young people to reduce the taboos surrounding the menstrual cycle.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Inclusion of menstrual health in HSP*. → Distribution of informative material in accessible and varied formats. 	<p>Consider all types of bodies when designing bathroom equipment and sanitary products.</p> <p>Absorbent underwear can be an important ally.</p>

* Acronym in English for Brazilian "Programa Saúde na Escola".

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MAKE INCLUSIVE MENSTRUAL CARE A REALITY

SOCIAL SUPPORT	KNOWLEDGE AND ABILITIES	FACILITIES AND SERVICES
<p>Form groups of parents and carers of children and young people with and without disabilities to carry out menstrual education, seeking engagement and protecting menstrual health.</p> <p>The barriers to access and to remain in formal education require the involvement of families and social workers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Exchanging experiences helps to fight stigmas and produce care. 	<p>Activities can be carried out in the territory, in educational actions undertaken by local health clinics or in partnership with schools.</p> <p>Families also need to be involved in education to protect children and young people and ensure they stay in school.</p>

Source: based on UNICEF, 2019.

Consider gender relations and involve cisgender men and boys to deconstruct stereotypes.

ENSURE THAT ALL PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ARE INVOLVED IN

- **Reviewing guidance** for menstrual care.
- Ensuring informative material is **accessible**.
- **Approving the design** of equipment, like washbasins and sanitary product dispensers.
- **Choosing accessible**, reliable and easy-to-use materials.



Respect participation: “Nothing About Us Without Us”!

RESPECT HUMAN FUNCTIONAL DIVERSITY

- **Use accessible communication materials:** simple language, sign language, files compatible with screen readers, augmentative and alternative communication, etc.
- **Promote knowledge** about the body and its function for independence and safety during periods.
- **Inform about the menstrual cycle, INCLUDING TIMES WHEN PREGNANCY IS MORE LIKELY.**
- **Show existing sanitary pads** to choose the most suitable and compatible one for each person.



Conduct inclusive campaign that represents persons with disabilities (intellectual, psychosocial, sensorial and physical), non-binary persons and transgender men in educational materials.

PRODUCE KNOWLEDGE TO REALIZE RIGHTS

The content of this booklet was developed based on debates, consultation with civil society in Brazil and used the references listed below:

Coletivo La Luz de Frida. Menstruação, aqui estamos! Direitos sexuais e deficiência. iiDi- Instituto Interamericano sobre Discapacidad y Desarrollo Inclusivo. Uruguay, 2022.

UNFPA; UNICEF. Pobreza menstrual no Brasil: Desigualdades e violações de direitos. Unicef: maio 2021. Disponível em: https://www.unicef.org/brazil/media/14456/file/dignidade-menstrual_relatorio-unicef-unfpa_maio2021.pdf

Instituto Patrícia Galvão; UNFPA. Saúde sexual e reprodutiva das mulheres: um guia para compreender e comunicar melhor. UNFPA, 2021. Disponível em: https://brazil.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/guia_ssr_web.pdf

UNICEF. Guidance on menstrual health and hygiene. First Edition. New York, NY: Unicef, March 2019. Disponível em: <https://www.unicef.org/media/91341/file/Unicef-Guidance-menstrual-health-hygiene-2019.pdf>

ENSP, Fiocruz. Guia de direitos e de saúde sexual das pessoas com deficiência. Rio de Janeiro, 2022. Disponível em: <https://www.arca.fiocruz.br/handle/icict/55749>

The myths surrounding menstruation worsen people's vulnerability.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

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MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Nísia Trindade Lima

MINISTRY OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND CITIZENSHIP

Sílvio Luiz de Almeida

NATIONAL DEPARTMENT FOR THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Anna Paula Feminella

OSWALDO CRUZ FOUNDATION – Fiocruz

Mário Moreira

VICE-CHAIR OF BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND COLLECTIONS – VPPCB

Alda Maria da Cruz

HEALTHCARE PUBLIC POLICY PROGRAMME AND MANAGEMENT MODELS – PMA

Isabela Soares Santos

Roberta Argento Goldstein

SOCIAL COOPERATION

José Leonídio Madureira de Sousa

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE HEALTH OF WOMEN, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FERNANDES FIGUEIRA

Antônio Flávio Vitarelli Meirelles

Mariana Setubal

SERGIO AROUCA NATIONAL SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Marco Menezes

Luciana Dias de Lima

HEALTH ADMINISTRATION AND PLANNING DEPARTMENT – DAPS/Ensp

Carla Lourenço Tavares de Andrade

FIOCRUZ COMMITTEE FOR ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Laís Silveira Costa (lais.costa@fiocruz.br)

Camila Athayde de Oliveira Dias

Maria Helena Mendonça

Corina H. F. Mendes

Gabriel Lima Simões

SUPPORT

La Luz de Frida

National front for women

with disabilities

National Health Council

Acolhe PCD

Simplex Assim

ACCESSIBILITY FEATURES

Helena Werneck – SMPD-Rio

Flávia Cortinovis – SMPD-Rio

Patrícia Almeida – Gadim Brasil

DESIGN/PUBLISHING

Dalila dos Reis

ILLUSTRATIONS

Janna Brilyantova

TRANSLATION

Timothy Came

WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HEALTHCARE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES?

Read the Brazilian Inclusion Law (Law 13,146/2015) and access our series using the QR codes below:



Menstrual care for Persons
with and without disabilities



Education - healthcare
for Persons with disabilities

If you witness discrimination due to disability, report it!

DIAL 100!* *Brazilian reporting channel

