



SESSION 3

Managing Periods - Managing Symptoms

Stuff you'll need!

- Presentation slides
- Post-it notes
- Pens
- Question box
- A space big enough to be active
- Access to a screen to watch videos (optional)

Aims of session

To increase knowledge of menstrual cycle symptoms
To identify strategies to manage menstrual cycle symptoms

This session is the third of four student-centred sessions. Each session includes active learning activities to support teacher-led components. The following symbols are used throughout the lesson plan to help you navigate:



Pupil Activities

These are only ideas! We have provided options depending on the space and resources you may have available.



Teacher-Led Sections

PowerPoint slides accompany this lesson plan.



Videos



Notes worth highlighting to the class

These are additional notes that you may want to highlight that are not included in the PowerPoint slides.



Optional Activity

Depending on space and time.

Introduction

There are two main sections to this session:

1. A recap of menstrual cycle symptoms
2. Strategies to manage symptoms

Section 1: A recap of menstrual cycle symptoms



To start, explain to your class that this lesson is focused on managing menstrual cycle symptoms and outline the aims of the session above (also on **slide 2**). Also explain that when we refer to female throughout the lessons, then we are referring to those that are assigned female at birth.



Activity 1: Symptoms reminder

Lesson two introduced symptoms. You can see what the pupils remember by posing the question: **'What symptoms are experienced across the menstrual cycle?'** (also on slide 4) Split the class into groups. Ask pupils to list all the menstrual cycle related symptoms they can remember within a certain time. This doesn't need to be a long task, a few minutes should be enough. They could be given points for correct symptoms; one point for commonly known symptoms (e.g. mood changes, abdominal and lower back pain, fatigue) and extra points for less commonly known symptoms (e.g. changes in body temperature, sleep, coordination).



Ensure they are thinking across the whole menstrual cycle and not just in the pre-menstrual phase and the first few days of menstruation. Also ensure they are thinking about both positive and negative experiences across the menstrual cycle.



Once students have completed activity 1 to the best of their ability, recap some of the various symptoms that people experience throughout the menstrual cycle (slide 5 & 6). Reiterate that menstrual cycle experiences are very individual (refer to slides 7 & 8 if helpful).

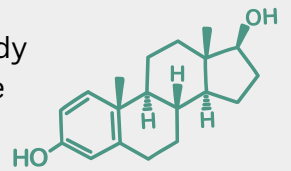


Symptoms can also change over time, so what they experience now, may be different in years to come (hence why it's important to recognise symptoms and what can be done to improve them if they are bothersome).

Reiterate that there are many positive experiences associated with the menstrual cycle and hormones can also make us feel good. A lot can be achieved during these times!

Young people often want to know why symptoms occur. The following information may help in explaining what research tells us about the causes of symptoms.

The exact causes are not known. Changes in the levels of hormones and body chemicals can cause positive and negative symptoms. Some people may be more sensitive to the hormonal changes or to the hormones themselves. Remember, hormones travel around the blood, so around the whole body and therefore can affect different parts of the body.



Substances called prostaglandins which are involved in pain and inflammation, trigger muscles of the uterus to contract so that the uterus lining can shed. Higher levels of prostaglandins are seen with more severe menstrual cramps.



Other hormones such as oestrogen can make people feel good and energised. It's not called the happy hormone for nothing!



Section 2. 1.Strategies to manage menstrual cycle symptoms

The next section focusses on various strategies that can be used to manage menstrual cycle and menstruation-related symptoms.



Activity 2: How can you take action?

'How can menstruating people take action to improve symptoms?' (slide 9)

There are a couple of activity options outlined in the next page.



Activity 2 cont.

Post-it notes - pupils can answer this individually, in pairs, or in small groups using post-it notes (or similar). To get students physically active, increase the distance required to place the post-it notes on a wall. You can set a time limit to increase the intensity and make it competitive between groups.

Think-Pair-Share – pupils can think individually about the answer, pair with another person, share their ideas with each other and then the rest of the class. Alternatively, before they share with the rest of the class, each pair finds a second pair to share their ideas and they add any missing ideas to their own list.



Once students have completed the activity, there are various strategies and things to try or reiterate which will help menstrual symptoms (refer to slide 10 to 24 if helpful for you).

'How can menstruating people take action to improve symptoms?'. It introduces the three things that are important to consider when managing symptoms - being prepared with having period products, tracking their menstrual cycle to help them learn about their own cycle and being proactive with lifestyle choices to help manage symptoms.

Be prepared:

Recap that all schools in the UK should have access to free period products to give to pupils and where they can access free products if they are outside of school in Scotland.



Reiterate to menstruating pupils that it's best to have period products and a change of underwear in their school bag as periods can come unexpectedly. Ensure pupils know they can access freely available products at school and ensure they know where they can find these within your school.



Discuss menstrual cycle information that can be tracked. The four main things to track include:

Track your cycle:

Menstrual cycle length - the time from the start of one period to the next

Bleeding length - how long a period lasts

Heaviness of bleeding - they can track how many soaked pads/tampons they use, the absorbencies and how often they need to change

Symptoms - both positive and negative throughout the cycle





It is empowering for menstruating people to know there are times where they feel much better e.g. with greater energy, ability to focus etc.

Tracking their cycle and logging symptoms will help them learn about their own menstrual cycle. It can also highlight when something is not normal e.g. if their cycle is too short or too long, bleeding occurs for longer than it should, or is excessively heavy. Reiterate that they should seek advice from a doctor if this is the case.



Be proactive:

Outline that various evidence-based lifestyle advice (for both inside and outside of school) to reduce unwanted symptoms. These include, exercising, physical activity and stretching, eating a well-balanced diet, good sleep habits, managing stress, heat for abdominal/back pain, being kind to yourself and some medications.

Slide 14 to 24 goes over each of the above lifestyle factors if you need to reiterate or go over any of them.



A well-balanced diet can help with symptoms . More **information about eating a well-balanced diet can be found** on the **[NHS website](#)**.

Other nutritional top tips include:

If bloated

Eat little and often, avoiding large meals. Chew food well (10 to 20 chews per mouthful). Avoid sweeteners ending in **OL** e.g. sorbitol. Only have one portion of fruit at a time.

If have cravings or want to eat more

If appetite is increased think about the quality of meals, ensuring all meals contain a source of protein, plenty of vegetables and a source of wholegrain carbohydrates

If nauseous or don't feel like eating

Snack on plain foods and eat little but often. Include protein and carbohydrates at every meal

If headaches are a problem

Ensure good hydration through drinking regularly throughout the day and monitoring urine to ensure that it is a pale straw colour. Avoid too much caffeine.

If feeling tired/lethargic

Keep energy levels topped up – an extra snack might be needed.

There may need to be an element of trial and error when using the lifestyle choices.

If discussing medications then it's very important to stress that **over-the counter medications should not be taken without discussing with a medical professional and parent/guardian and always follow instructions**. For example, it always best to take non-steroidal anti-inflammatories such as ibuprofen along with food as there is risk of gastrointestinal issues.

Some over-the-counter medications can help alleviate symptoms. Often these are ibuprofen and paracetamol. **However, emphasise the importance of speaking to a medical practitioner (e.g. pharmacist/GP) before taking any of these medications as there can be adverse side-effects and some people should avoid ibuprofen (e.g. if they have asthma).** More information can be found on the [NHS website](#).



Activity 3: Identify and plan three things to help manage symptoms

'Identify and plan things to help manage symptoms' along with 'a day in the life of Danielle' case study character (slide 25). In groups, invite pupils to help the character identify and plan different things that would help manage their symptoms throughout the day.

Alternatively, if they are comfortable, one of the group members could share their menstrual cycle symptoms and the group could help identify and plan realistic changes they could make to their lifestyle to manage their symptoms throughout the day.

To prepare for lesson 4 (activity 2): give pupils the following question to go away and think about 'What are the general concerns or barriers to participating in PE whilst menstruating?'. They could return their answers via the question box (or similar).



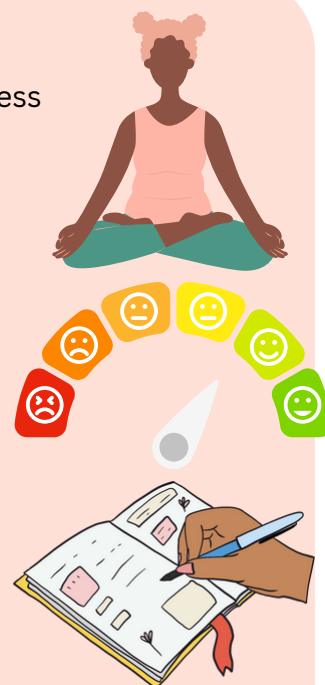
Extension resources and tasks

If they have time, pupils could execute one of the strategies e.g. mindfulness and meditation for stress, yoga.

Depending on the age and stage of the pupils, you could ask them to consider how they might evaluate how they feel pre and post activity. For example, they could consider use ratings or scales to evaluate symptom severity pre and post.

You could ask them how they might adapt this lifestyle intervention for a different symptom.

You could ask them to produce a reflective journal with tracking of symptoms, alongside the method they are using and bring it to the next session to follow up with the exercise and physical activity component.



Question Box



Add a question box during and after the lesson so pupils have an anonymous safe space to ask questions or highlight concerns that they may otherwise find embarrassing, uncomfortable or lack the vocabulary to express. Ensure you follow-up with the answers and set expectations around timelines. Answering pupil questions could be a good way to start the next lesson in this block.

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