

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## The effectiveness of interventions that support women, girls, and people who menstruate to participate in physical activity: a rapid overview of reviews September 2024

### Background

Adults (age 18-64 years) are recommended either 150-300 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous or 75-150 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity per week. However, the number of women **not** meeting recommended physical activity levels is 5% higher than men globally. Women, girls and people who menstruate face multiple barriers to participating in physical activity, including gender bias, low perceived exercise skills and competence, and insufficient support from peers and/or family. Moreover, menstruation is often reported as a barrier. Numerous interventions have been proposed to increase the physical activity participation of women, girls, and people who menstruate.

This Rapid Overview of Reviews follows on from a [Rapid Evidence Summary](#) conducted in July 2024.

### Aim

The aim of this rapid overview of reviews is to investigate the effectiveness of interventions that support women, girls, and people who menstruate to participate in physical activity. Additionally, this review examines whether any of these interventions incorporate managing physical activity participation throughout the menstrual cycle.

### Results

Fifteen systematic reviews across 16 reports (published between 2008-2024) were included in the review. The population included young and adolescent girls (n=9), adult women (n=3), mothers and daughters (n=2), and mixed age categories (n=1).

### Key Findings

A wide range of interventions were identified which were educational, environmental or multicomponent **but none of the included systematic reviews described interventions focusing on managing physical activity participation throughout the menstrual cycle.** Most

reviews found mixed effectiveness in increasing physical activity participation, leading to inconclusive results.

### **Evidence Gaps**

- There seems to be a **lack of evidence** regarding interventions that support **managing physical activity participation throughout the menstrual cycle**.
- The design and delivery of existing interventions and their components were often **not defined**, and they were grouped based on the delivery setting, such as school or community. This leads to clinical diversity (heterogeneity) and lack of generalisability.
- Only two reviews reported including **ethnic minorities**, and none of the publications mentioned **people who menstruate but do not identify as girl or woman**.
- There is a need for more research using **uniform and reliable data collection and analytical methods** that are sensitive to detect changes in specific populations, whether it is girls, women or people who menstruate.
- Over half of primary research studies within the systematic reviews were poor quality or had high to moderate risk of bias.

### **Policy and Practice Implications**

- Future research needs to focus on **developing and evaluating interventions** that help managing physical activity throughout the menstrual cycle. The findings can inform workplace, educational and other relevant physical activity recommendations for women, girls and people who menstruate.
- Policymakers will need to consider **guidance that could help reduce societal taboo** around the menstrual cycle and menstruation.
- Future research will need to develop **robust study designs and define and describe interventions** for replicability and generalisability.
- Needs of and interventions for **ethnic minority groups** and **people who menstruate** will need to be investigated.

**Find the full report here:** <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-5098557/v1>