

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

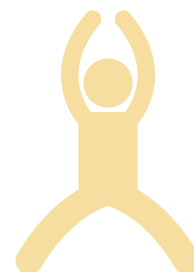
July 2024

Judit Csontos, Deborah Edwards, Elizabeth Gillen, Juliet Hounsome, Meg Kiseleva, Mala Mann, Amrita Sidhu, Natalie Brown, Steven Macey, Melanie Matthews, Ruth Lewis, Adrian Edwards, Elizabeth Doe, Claire James, Alison Cooper

Background

Adults 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:

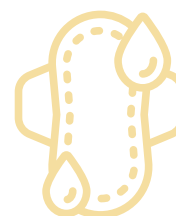
- menstruation
- gender bias
- low perceived exercise skills and competence
- insufficient support from peers or family

This 'Rapid Overview of Reviews' follows on from a **Rapid Evidence Summary** conducted in July 2024.

Aim

The aim of this review is to:

- investigate the **effectiveness of interventions** that support women, girls, and people who menstruate to participate in physical activity
- further understand whether any of the interventions incorporate **managing physical activity participation throughout the menstrual cycle**.



Evidence Base

Fifteen **systematic reviews** across 16 reports (published between 2008-2024) were included in the review.

What is a systematic review?

A thorough and detailed scientific review of existing literature on a particular topic

Key Findings

A wide range of intervention types were identified, including:



Educational



Environmental



Multi-component

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

Evidence Gaps

There was a **distinct lack of evidence** around **interventions to support physical activity participation related to the menstrual cycle**.

Existing interventions were often grouped by delivery setting (such as school or community) so **potentially limiting transferability of findings**.

Only two reviews mentioned **minority ethnic groups**.

None of the publications mentioned 'people who menstruate, **but do not identify as female**'.

Over half of primary research studies within the systematic reviews were **poor quality** or had **high to moderate risk of bias**.

What is 'risk of bias'?

This is the likelihood that features of the study design will give misleading results.

Future Research Implications

There is a need for future research to focus on:

- **developing and evaluating interventions** that help to manage physical activity **throughout the menstrual cycle**.
- further understanding the needs of, and interventions for, **ethnic minority groups**.

The full rapid review is available to view here:

[The effectiveness of interventions that support women, girls, and people who menstruate to participate in physical activity: a rapid overview of reviews | Research Square](#)