

Sport and exercise

for girls and young women with bleeding disorders



This information answers common questions from girls and young women with bleeding disorders about sport and exercise.

How can I best participate?

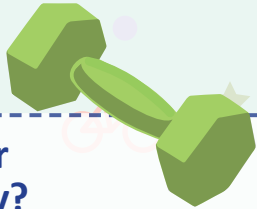
What types of sport or exercise should I do?

How can I manage my periods?

What about injuries?

What should I tell my coach or club?

Read on to learn more.



What kind of sport or exercise do you enjoy?

If you are a young woman or girl with a bleeding disorder, like everyone, you are encouraged to exercise and be active. It's vital to healthy living!

Give it a try!

There is something for everybody and it's a matter of finding something that suits you, that you enjoy and that can get you moving.

It doesn't have to be expensive or take up a lot of your time. The activity you choose can be easy, short and fun.

“ There is no one size fits all. I keep active and try new things to find what works for me. Having the freedom to take these challenges on has helped me into adulthood and developed my confidence in all areas of life. ”

What to try?

Looking for ideas? Young Australian women with bleeding disorders gave us some examples of what they do:

Hiking
Basketball
Swimming
Gym
HIIT
Soccer
Barre
Netball
Yoga
Aerobics
Dancing
Pilates
Running
Walking
Bike Riding
T-Ball
Bushwalking
Touch Football
Weightlifting



Risks?

Talk to your Haemophilia Treatment Centre

For most types of exercise, Haemophilia Treatment Centres (HTCs) suggest you try it and contact them if you have any problems. If you have a severe bleeding disorder or very low factor levels, you might need to consider the type of exercise you participate in more carefully and discuss it with your HTC. If you are not sure whether it is suitable, call your HTC and have a chat to the physiotherapist. Their suggestion is that you ease into any new activity gently and build up skills, strength, power and length of time as you progress.

If you have injuries often or you are planning to start a new sport or high-level exercise and you are worried about the risks, please discuss it with your HTC/health professional first.

Your HTC can also help you with a plan to prevent and recover from injuries.

Take care with sports or exercise that involve banging yourself against people or things, doing repetitive or extreme movements, going high speed or dropping from a great height – definitely a good idea to talk to your HTC or health professional about risks and having a plan before you take them on!

Why exercise if you have a bleeding disorder?

If you have a bleeding disorder, there are great benefits to you from having regular exercise and being physically fit.

- Physical activity can help you stay healthy, develop strong and flexible muscles to protect you from injury and manage your weight, which will also reduce strain on your joints.
- Aerobic exercise can improve the health of your heart and lungs.
- In the long term, maintaining your muscle strength can keep your bones and muscles healthy.
- Exercise can help you feel in charge of your health generally.
- Good physical health can sometimes reduce how often you have bleeding episodes. If you have strong muscles, it can protect you from injury to your joints and as a result mean that you have fewer bleeds.

Exercise is not just about being fit. Being physically active can improve your mood and your concentration, reduce stress and help you to sleep better. Being with your friends – perhaps part of a team – and having fun are also important aspects of exercising.

What kind of sport or exercise?

It's OK to take some time while you try different things out to find a physical activity you enjoy and can do. Remember that it doesn't have to be a sport – it can be any physical activity. For example, many girls and young women with bleeding disorders like dance, barre work, going to the gym, hiking, gardening, pilates and yoga and just going for a walk with friends.

Working closely with your Haemophilia Treatment Centre is important. Being active isn't only about finding a sport or physical activity you enjoy, but also involves making an individual plan for you about:

- preventing bleeds and injuries
- managing your treatment
- recovery after a bleeding episode
- and having an emergency plan, just in case.

The type of sport or exercise you take part in and your plan might depend on the severity of your bleeding disorder or how low your factor levels are.

Know your limits and make sure you balance exercise with plenty of rest, particularly if you're just getting started. Build up slowly and steadily and don't start too fast or heavy.

Getting started

When you're deciding what sport or exercise is best for you, answer the following questions and discuss with your HTC or health professional:

- What type of sport or activity are you interested in?
- What are your fitness goals?
- Do you have any injuries or physical limitations from previous bleeding episodes?
- What are the risks and the benefits from participating in the sport or exercise you are considering?

Risks

Some sports and activities have more risk for people with bleeding disorders, particularly where there are:

- a lot of physical contact or collisions
- repetitive or extreme movements
- high speeds or great heights involved.

Your management plan

Talk to your HTC team. You may need to have a physical assessment and ongoing monitoring from the physiotherapist. The team will develop a plan with you to decrease the risk of injury and to manage bleeding episodes and recovery. This may also involve:

- modifying the exercise if appropriate
- wearing the standard protective equipment and clothing
- wearing well-fitting and supportive shoes, with the shoe laces done up to reduce the risk of ankle injuries
- using extra protection such as bracing or taping, as recommended by your HTC physiotherapist
- being prepared for emergencies, for example, having your ABDR patient card on you, and someone else who knows what to do to support you or in case of an accident.

What can I do about heavy periods?

This is a common question from girls and young women with bleeding disorders who want to take part in sport or exercise programs. If you have heavy bleeding and pain from your periods, it can interfere with your daily life and mean you are less physically active. Heavy periods can lead to anaemia (low levels of iron in the blood), which can make you feel faint and tired and short of breath.

If your periods are causing problems for you, it is important for you to discuss this with your HTC nurse and doctor to see how this can best be managed. They might refer you to a gynaecologist (women's health specialist) and develop a treatment plan for you so that your periods can be more manageable. You might also need treatment for anaemia. It is worth persevering to find a treatment plan that works for you – getting your periods under control can make a difference to



your life generally, as well as making it easier to do sport, dance or go to the gym.

Period pain

Heat packs and rest or distraction can sometimes help with pain during your period. Exercise can also reduce pain for some young women. Talk to your specialist doctor (haematologist) before taking medications for pain. Paracetamol (e.g., Panadol™) is usually recommended to start with but other medications such as ibuprofen (e.g., Nurofen™) or aspirin can make a bleeding tendency worse.



Periods - what to wear?

On a practical note, it's worth investigating the types of sanitary protection around and see what works best for you. Sanitary products include pads, tampons, menstrual cups and period underwear, swimwear and activewear, which come in different sizes and thicknesses. Menstrual cups and period wear can be washed and used again. These products are all widely available online and most are in shops like large supermarkets and pharmacies, including menstrual cups and period underwear.

If you have heavy periods, you may find that you use a couple of different products at once, for example, inserting a tampon or a menstrual cup and having a pad or period underwear as an extra barrier against leakage. Make sure you follow the instructions about changing products regularly and washing reusable items – the last thing you want is to get an infection out of having a period!

Get to know how exercise impacts on bleeding with your period. You may find it works best if you change your tampon or pad immediately before you exercise and at half-time or breaks.

Talk to other girls and young women and see what tips they have – you might be surprised to find how many others have problems with heavy periods, even if they don't have a bleeding disorder!

Protection, treatment and recovery from injuries

Treatment and recovery while engaging in sport or exercise will be different for everyone and will also depend on your fitness level. Talk to the HTC team about a specific plan for you – the specialist doctor (haematologist), nurse and physiotherapist.

You can help to prevent bruising and bleeds from exercise by:

- Building up the muscles around the joints specifically for the sport or activity you are doing
- Using appropriate equipment such as helmets, pads etc as required, and using it correctly!

Although it's not essential, letting your coach, trainer or instructor know about your bleeding disorder would be very helpful. Making sure they're aware of any pre-existing injuries and your limitations can help them modify exercises for you if needed. It's important that someone you are with is aware of your bleeding disorder, a coach or a team member, and knows what to do in an emergency, especially if you have an accident and are unconscious.

Having a plan for treatment, your ABDR patient card in your wallet or accessible and a first aid kit in your sports bag and at home will make sure you're ready for anything that may happen. Don't forget to make sure your emergency contact details are also up-to-date just in case.

What to have in your first aid kit

- Your regular treatment, or the treatment for an injury in your treatment plan
- Emergency contact number
- Crepe bandage and padding
- HTC contact details/ ABDR patient card.
- Tissues
- Band-aids
- Ice pack



If you experience any bleeding from engaging in sport or exercise:

- Undertake first aid including P.R.I.C.E. (protection and product, rest, ice, compression, elevation). This reduces swelling and joint and muscle pain.
- Follow up with your HTC for guidance on rehabilitation and returning to exercise.
- If it is a musculoskeletal injury, most HTCs will have a physiotherapist attached to the Centre who can give specific advice.



Other things to think about

- Many of the sports supplements have ingredients that are not recommended for bleeding disorders. Before you take a supplement, talk to your specialist doctor (haematologist) or pharmacist about what to be cautious with or avoid.
- You can meet other girls and young women with bleeding disorders through your local Haemophilia Foundation – a great way to share tips and experiences and just have fun together.



Any questions?

If you need more information or support, contact your local Haemophilia Treatment Centre.



You can find contact details of Haemophilia Treatment Centres around Australia on the Haemophilia Foundation Australia website.

For more information about bleeding disorders, or how to get in touch with your local Haemophilia Foundation or a specialist Haemophilia Treatment Centre, contact:

Haemophilia Foundation Australia (HFA)

T: 1800 807 173

E: hfaust@haemophilia.org.au

W: www.haemophilia.org.au

More reading

Check out **Factored In**, the HFA youth website, for information and stories on sport and exercise for young people with bleeding disorders – www.factoredin.org.au

BBC Science Focus - What happens to my body when I exercise? - <https://www.sciencefocus.com/the-human-body/what-happens-to-my-body-when-i-exercise/>

BRuCe: the AHCDO bleeds risk calculator – Activity risk categories - http://www.brucecalc.net/activity_categories.php

Canadian Hemophilia Society – Precautions in hemophilia - <https://www.hemophilia.ca/precautions-in-hemophilia/>

Healthdirect - Exercise and mental health - <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/exercise-and-mental-health>

InVIVO Academy with HFA and HFNZ - On the move with haemophilia - <https://www.haemophilia.org.au/publications/haemophilia/sport>

An education resource for parents, teachers and coaches on sport and exercise in young people with haemophilia.

Ask your HTC about other resources. For example, the book **Boys will be boys** has useful information about risks with particular sports and relevant protective equipment.

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References

Visit the Girls and Sport section on the Factored In website (www.factoredin.org.au) for a full list of references.

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For more information visit factoredin.org.au

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