

**A:K:TIVE**

**Coaching Young  
Women And Girls  
Toolkit**



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# Overview

The simple fact about coaching is that there is no one way. However, we do know that the main reason most people play sport is for fun. Fun is defined by the individual, it is not gender specific, and as coaches we have significant influence in terms of the experiences had in sport.

Before puberty boys and girls are very similar. Sex differences in athletic performance and engagement generally coincide with the onset of puberty. We hope to give you some insight and understanding into how best to coach young women and girls and how you can create a safe, enjoyable and supportive environment to enhance their sporting experiences and help them, to realise their potential.

A GOOD COACH  
CAN CHANGE A  
GAME

A GREAT COACH  
CAN CHANGE A  
LIFE

**Statistic:**

54% of young women aged between 12-17 years participate for fitness or health **MORE >**

**Thought:**

Impulsive behaviour is an emotional response

**Thought:**

Look to form connections, build relationships and have high levels of empathy.

**Question:**

Are you communicating differently with young women and girls?

**Thought:**

The priority is to do sport for enjoyment, not to win.

**Question:**

What strategies will you employ to ensure the young women and girls you coach are motivated and happy?

**Statistic:**

By the age of 17, 59% of young women state they are too busy to participate, compared to 46% of young men. **MORE >**



**General insights**

**Thought:**

No age group is more focused on bodies and appearance than adolescent girls.

**Statistic:**

69% aged of young women aged between 12-17 years participate for fun **MORE >**

**Thought:**

Women and girls react more so to the mood of the coach.

**Thought:**

Developing team 'culture' is a process. Rather than a one-time thing it's an all-time thing, no matter how many seasons a team has been together.

**Statistic:**

68% of young women will avoid activities when they don't feel confident about their bodies **MORE >**

**Question:**

How might you provide the right environment to enhance their experience?

# What women and girls want from a coach?

Creating a safe and supportive environment is the key element for all coaching, for all ages, genders and abilities. Getting your coaching approach 'right' has huge implications to ensure that at all levels of participation people have a positive and rewarding physical activity experience that will help them enjoy sport and recreation for life.

The key phrase to retain from this section is '**creating a safe and supportive environment**' with some focus elements specific for young women and girls and what they are looking for in sport and coaching. This information is intended to influence your coaching style and delivery to bring out the best in the young women and girls you coach.

## Coaching thoughts

**Get to know everyone. This includes understanding who they are, what motivates them, what's going on in their lives, what are their other commitments, and in sport what their goals are, and which methods will bring out the best in them.**

**Coaches should provide good technical instruction and positive feedback, allow young women and girls to participate in decision-making, create positive team atmospheres, and develop warm interpersonal relationships with them.**



# A coach's influence



	Influence	Actions
<b>Possibilities - opening her eyes to what she can do</b>	Inspiring her with real and relatable influences. Imaginary and stories of women like me to prime her participation.	Stories framed around personal successes. Include early stages of other women's participation journeys.
<b>Togetherness - together she is strong</b>	A friend's invitation makes sport possible = safety in numbers. Reward of socialising and bonding becomes an external motivator.	Breakdown barriers, taking part with someone else, sharing intentions increases commitment.
<b>Progression - giving her a sense of direction</b>	Skilled feedback and structured guidance with someone with more expertise than her help sustain participation along the journey.	Improvement suggestions, praise, setting realistic goals, ongoing and personalised.
<b>Internalise - helping her reflect on her achievements</b>	Bringing out the internal rewards of taking part in sport.	Focus shift to feeling good, heighten her awareness of personal progress, internalise her own sport behavioral journey.

# Puberty and menstruation

If you coach young women and girls, there are some important biophysical differences you need to think about; acknowledging however, that each individual is different and these are guidelines.

Puberty	
What happens?	What to consider
Body fat increases	Movement patterns can be affected, allow time for adjustment
Wider pelvis	There can be a decline in speed and movement patterns change
There is no change to the strength to muscle-mass ratio	Strength development training can continue with a focus on skill acquisition
Lung volume and capacity increases	Fitness development training can continue
Puberty begins earlier in girls (~11 – 14 years). But period starts ~2.5 years after onset	

## What does it all mean?

As a coach you have the opportunity to create a safe and supportive environment by managing expectations of how their bodies are changing. It is important to be proactive in allowing the time for these changes and spend more time on elements of movement that may require different focus.

### Some coaching advice regarding training approaches:

- Encourage a healthy/balanced diet
- Minimise intense workouts sessions
- Encourage different training methods
  - cross train
- Be patient with your athlete and encourage participants to be patient with themselves.

Puberty tends to favour boys athletic development. Boys acquire height, weight and muscle mass simultaneously, whereas girls acquire height, weight and muscle mass sequentially – this means there is a lag in strength development in girls (and typically not boys). Ideally girls need to focus on skill development and need to re-learn movement patterns with their ‘new’ biomechanics and progressively build strength again. This is only temporary however often this is when girls walk away from sport as they think they are getting slow or movement doesn’t feel like it used to.





# Menstruation

The average menstrual cycle is 28 days long (although it can range between 21 and 35 days). Hormones course through the veins delivering orders from the organs to the brain (and vice versa) to perform nearly everything you do. Hormones tell the body when to eat, sleep and even when to grow.

This means that at certain times of the cycle there may be better training gains depending on which hormone is in a high or low phase.

Everyone is different however and for that reason individual tracking and understanding of the cycle is key. Not everyone will feel stronger at ovulation, not everyone will experience feeling lethargic. The oral contraceptive pill will also have an impact and these phases may not apply.

# Menstruation

Phase	Days	Physiology	Training	Recovery
<b>1</b>	1 to 5 (Period)	Great time to learn complex skills where good coordination is required.	Maximum training benefit may come from high intensity and strength training.	The increase in inflammation, may mean that it takes longer to recover from exercise so focusing on recovery during this phase is important.
<b>2</b>	6 to 14	You may notice an increase in energy levels through this phase.	High intensity in strength training has been shown to be superior during this phase. Factor in time to complete a more progressive and thorough warmup. This is particularly important when you are making short, sharp directional changes.	Repair of muscle tissue has been found to be better, which will help with recovery from intense training. However, it can take at least 48 hours to recover from an intense training session.
<b>3</b>	6 to 14	Breathing rate and heart rate at rest and during exercise increase. Blood sugar levels are more likely to be unstable. Changing hormone levels can affect mood and make you feel a bit more lethargic.	All types of training are beneficial in this phase. Energy levels may not be as high, this is a good time to consolidate training from phase two.	Longer to recover. Offset by focusing on your recovery strategies and adding more recovery time.
<b>4</b>	24 to 28	Through this phase the ability to fall asleep is more difficult including waking more frequently during sleep.	Light to moderate intensity exercise. Try to include some yoga or pilates exercises as these have been shown to help reduce premenstrual syndrome (PMS).	Increase in inflammation may reduce your ability to recover after tough training session.

# TAKE ACTION

Exercise during the menstruation cycle  
is one the of the most effective times to train:

Reduces physical feelings of period pain. 



Can have a positive effect on mood. 



Body can produce its strongest and fastest performances. 



Muscles can recover faster from exercise. 

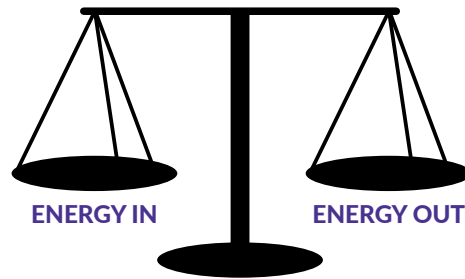


Body can make peak strength gains.

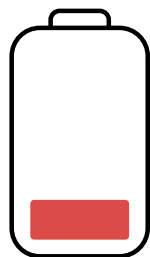
# Energy is fuel / elements of physical growth

## ENERGY BALANCE

Energy Intake  
- Total Energy Expenditure



## What do your energy levels look like?



STRUGGLING  
(RED-5)



SURVIVING



THRIVING

## What do you see if there is not enough energy intake?

Decreased co-ordination/concentration. 

•

Decreased ability to train hard, adapt or recover. 

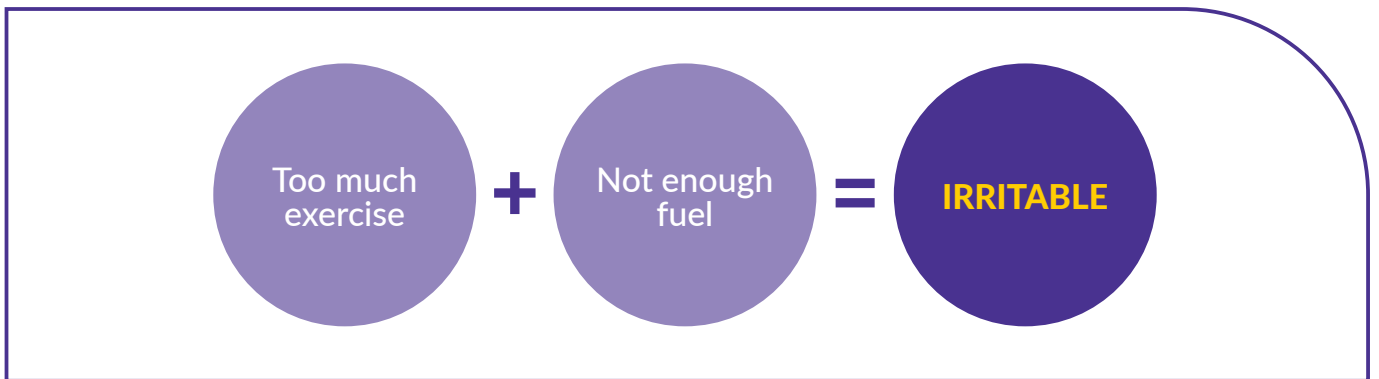
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Constant fatigue. 

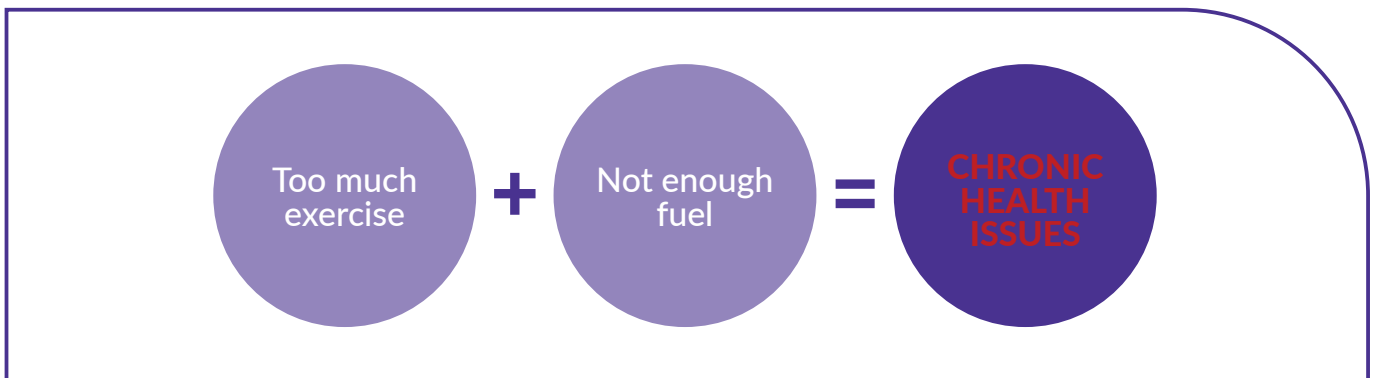
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Decreased motivation.

## Short term effects



## Long term effects



## What could happen

Impaired body functions including immune system. 

•

Menstrual cycle irregularities. 

•

Bone health issues. 

•

Impaired growth and development. 

•

Psychological issues.

# WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Look, listen and ask questions, ensure that before training or a game participants are fueled.

If you are concerned about someone you coach, refer them to a doctor or a qualified nutritionist.




# What's happening during menstruation?

Phase	Days	What am I seeing?	What am I seeing?	What can I do?
<b>1</b>	1 to 5 (Period)	Risk of getting sick is higher. May see flu-like symptoms.	"I had a bad sleep last night", "I didn't feel like lunch today", "I think I'm getting sick."	Ensure your players have eaten, ask the question. Ensure your players have had enough sleep, ask the question.
<b>2</b>	6 to 14	Best time to train. Energy levels are good. Lots of activity from players.	"I feel good", "I had a great sleep last night", players suggesting training options.	Great time to do a longer, more intense session.
<b>3</b>	6 to 14	Energy levels are up and down.	"I'm tired", "I'm hungry", "how much longer?"	Monitor the players during the session, adapt training methods to suit energy levels. Low energy = technique focus.
<b>4</b>	24 to 28	Sore bodies may influence ability to train as well as the time to recover from more intense session/games.	"I'm sore", "I'm still sore from last training", "Can we have a lighter session today?"	Ensure your players have eaten well. What did you have? Ensure good fueling as it will assist during this phase.


# COACHING TIPS

Feed the training! It is very important to get it right. 



Fuel training - doing a long endurance effort one hour plus, increase the intake of carbohydrates before a session. 



When doing higher intensity sessions, consider having high energy source during your workout to maintain energy levels. 



The quality of your food is far more important than the number of calories it contains. 



Sleep may be disrupted during some phases, so try to encourage foods to help with sleeping for example.



# Injury risk specific to young women and girls

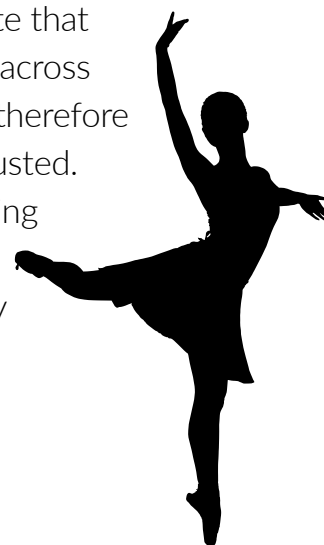
## Reflect

Sport can be very demanding, not just in terms of the physical fitness required, but also the stress on bones, ligaments, tendons, and muscles.

Young women and girls who participate in sports that involve lunging, jumping, pivoting and quick changes of direction risk incurring a significant injury compared to their male counterparts taking part in the same sport. These injuries are sometimes sustained in a collision but are often caused by hard landings, jumps and sudden pivots and

changes of direction. It is great that young women and girls are participating in sport however we need to ensure as coaches that we prepare them properly.

It is also important to note that levels of fatigue change across the menstrual cycle and therefore training needs to be adjusted. Tracking and understanding by an individual of their menstrual cycle will really aid with this.



## Consider

Injury	Risk	Cause	Coaching tips
<b>Concussion</b>	Up to 2x more likely than males	Sustained in a collision but are often caused by hard landings. You don't have to hit your head to be concussed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice good technique</li> <li>• Avoid working out while overly fatigued</li> </ul>
<b>Bone</b>	2 – 4 x more likely to fracture during puberty	Oestrogen is ESSENTIAL to normal bone remodeling. Girls gain 25% of bone mass around puberty, 92% of total bone mass density by late puberty (18 years). Adequate energy intake to support training and development is essential.	
<b>Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL)</b>	Up to 8 x more likely during the first 2 phases of the menstrual cycle	Wider hips, which can affect the alignment of the knee and more prone to knees that move inward (knock-kneed). The strength and neuro muscular deficit that young women and girls develop during puberty also contributes to more instability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to develop muscle groups evenly</li> <li>• Create a balance between strength and flexibility</li> <li>• Reduce training load after long training breaks</li> <li>• Break a sweat before intense workouts</li> </ul>

# TAKE ACTION

Include a combination of balance, strength, agility, and plyometric exercises at least 2x week for 20mins, completed during warm up. Start pre-season and continue throughout the year. Ideally you can start this style of training pre-puberty. Check out these dynamic warm-ups as examples [Netball Smart >](#) and [FIFA11 >](#)



Technique is important and feedback improves effectiveness. These are preventative methods for all injuries common to women and girls. Stress the importance of rest and recovery and support your women and girls.



Make sure that you are proactively monitoring loads and adjust sessions accordingly to allow for appropriate recovery.



## Conclusion

This toolkit is to help you as a coach to create great environments for young women and girls to flourish. There is an abundance of existing information regarding how to be a great coach and this toolkit adds to all the knowledge and experience you already have.

The content is designed to help you gain a better insight into what young women and girls experience. Included are general insights into young women and girls' motivations and

what they might look for in a coach. It also acknowledges the effects of puberty and the menstrual cycle, the importance of having adequate energy and fuel to train, and addresses injury risk and prevention.

We hope this aids you as a coach to create safe, enjoyable and supportive environments so that you can enhance the sporting experiences of young women and girls and help them, to realise their full potential.

# References and links

- [Healthy Women in Sport >](#)
- [Fitr women >](#)
- [Good Sports and HERA | Aktive >](#)
- [Advocating for Women and Girls Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aoteroa >](#)
- [Injury-free sport and recreation. >](#)
- [Netball Smart - Official injury prevention programme of Netball New Zealand >](#)

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Mountjoy, M., Sundgot-Borgen, J. K., Burke, L. M., Ackerman, K. E., Blauwet, C., Constantini, N., Lebrun, C., Lundy, B., Melin, A. K., Meyer, N. L., Sherman, R. T., Tenforde, A. S., Klungland Torstveit, M., & Budgett, R. (2018). IOC consensus statement on relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S): 2018 update. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 52(11), 687-697 >

Information in this toolkit is for guidance only and does not constitute formal professional advice. Where specific issues arise in your organisation/club, advice should be sought from the relevant expert(s) as necessary.

## Ngā mihi.

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