

Women's Health

Women's health needs are the same regardless of whether you have a physical disability or not.

Preventative Health and Screening

Guidelines and recommendations for health screening are the same for all women, and it is strongly recommended that all women complete these at the relevant times. Types of screening tests and how they are performed is changing, with technology advances and research finding new and improved ways to complete vital testing. There are also different ways tests can be completed depending on an individual's level of ability or cultural needs.

Challenges to access some screening tests and services are often great for those with physical disabilities: for example, mammogram or Papsmear tests are not possible for some women with physical disabilities.

It is essential that screening tests – and physical abilities limiting access to testing – are discussed with a GP. In many cases, alternative testing options exist – while they may not have the same

degree of accuracy, they are far better than testing not being undertaken at all.

Some screening services may have limited physical access for wheelchairs, or not have a hoist for transfers. If this is the case, ask your GP if they offer home visits or what alternate screening options or testing at an alternate location are available.

For people who struggle to lie or stand still for an extended period of time, alternate screening options may need to be arranged – this is best discussed with a GP.

Mental health and wellbeing

Many women experience depression and anxiety at some time, and women with physical disabilities experience mental health concerns in the same way as the wider community. There is an increased chance of these conditions during pregnancy and after delivery; chronic physical illness may also contribute to conditions such as anxiety and depression.



Mental Health Supports

Mental health concerns must never be ignored. If anyone is experiencing feelings of depression, anxiety or any other concern relating to mental health, there are many resources available. See your GP or contact the below services, in case of crisis, attendance at the closest hospital emergency department is recommended.

- **Beyond Blue** – information and support for depression and anxiety
 - Phone: 1300 224 636
 - Online: beyondblue.org.au
- **Think Mental Health** – online mental health check-up tool and free resources
 - Online: thinkmentalhealthwa.com.au

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- **Lifeline Australia** – crisis support and suicide prevention
 - Phone: 13 11 14
 - Online: lifeline.org.au
- **The Samaritans** – 24/7 anonymous crisis support
 - Phone: 135 247
 - Online: thesamaritans.org.au
- **Suicide Call Back Service** – free mental health counselling for people affected by suicide
 - Phone: 1300 659 467
 - Online: suicidecallbackservice.org.au
- **Women's Health and Wellbeing Services**
 - Phone: 9490 2258
 - Online: whws.org.au

Monthly periods and having children

There are many elements of women's health that can be particularly challenging to manage with a physical disability – periods, pregnancy and childbirth are just a few of the important health considerations for women. Fortunately, there are many support and information options available to provide guidance at all stages of a woman's life.

For women not planning to have children in the near future, or ever, there are options available to temporarily or permanently stop periods. Speak with your GP about the best options for you.

For family or carers of women with severe and complex physical and intellectual disabilities, the pain, personal care requirements and difficulty of understanding monthly periods can be very challenging. Consultation with a GP is recommended to discuss period management options most suitable for each individual.

For women with physical disabilities who experience a monthly period, the use of pads and tampons can be challenging. A GP, community nurse or occupational therapist can provide ideas on how best to manage personal care around periods.



Visit futurethinking.abilitycentre.com.au for more information.

