



**AN INTRODUCTION
TO
WOMEN'S HEALTH
FOR
YOUNG CRICKETERS**

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This resource has been produced by the

ECB & England Women's Health Group

and

MCC Foundation

to introduce young cricketers to the topic of women's health in cricket.



The content of this resource is intended to help and empower young cricketers that are about to start, or are going through, puberty (secondary school age) and address some of the concerns they may have. Some of the content may be culturally sensitive.

It should be noted that there are a wide variety of resources available covering these topic areas and the purpose of this document is to provide an easy-to-read overview.

The topic of women's health in cricket is an evolving area and some of this information may be updated as new insight becomes available. The information in this resource is based on research evidence.

1. BENEFITS OF CRICKET AND BEING ACTIVE

There are a variety of benefits to playing cricket (and being active in general). As well as the physical benefits of keeping our bodies healthy, playing cricket has a number of mental, personal and social benefits too.

Physical:

- Improves physical fitness
- Reduces risk of obesity¹
- Lowers blood pressure and levels of blood sugar¹
- Builds a stronger heart, stronger bones and healthier muscles²
- Improves sleep³ (also a mental benefit)

Mental:

- Boosts self-esteem¹
- Builds confidence¹
- Reduces the symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression¹
- Improves concentration²

Personal/social:

- Opportunity to learn life skills such as leadership, goal-setting, strategic thinking and teamwork¹
- Research suggests girls who participate in sport are more likely to experience academic success and stay in school than those who do not play sport¹
- Provides an opportunity to socialise and make new friends²
- Gives an understanding of different cultures
- Develops ability to deal with setbacks

TASK: Think of three ways that playing cricket benefits you.

¹Sport Scotland - https://funding4sport.co.uk/downloads/women_25_benefits.pdf

²GOSH - <https://www.gosh.nhs.uk/conditions-and-treatments/general-health-advice/leading-active-lifestyle/exercise-children-and-young-people/>

³UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines - [UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/424242/UK_Chief_Medical_Officers_Physical_Activity_Guidelines.pdf)

2. OVERVIEW OF PUBERTY

As a young person, your body is going through a number of physical changes to prepare you for being an adult. Everyone starts puberty at different times and at different speeds - it is completely normal to start noticing the physical changes to your body before or after your friends. For girls, puberty usually starts at some point between the ages of 8 and 13⁴. It is a good idea to speak to a GP if signs of puberty arrive before you turn 8 or have not started by the age of 14.

CHANGING BODY SHAPE - When going through puberty, your body will start to change shape. You will grow quickly (known as a growth spurt) and you will gain weight which will likely affect the overall shape of your body - girls typically gain weight on their hips and their breasts develop. Gaining weight and changing shape is part of developing into an adult. If you experience body changes that you don't feel comfortable about, or have concerns about your weight or diet, contact your GP or BEAT ([click here](#) to be directed to their website).⁴

As your body changes shape, you may notice that you start to develop stretch marks which are caused by the sudden growth you experience during puberty. Stretch marks are very common - they are harmless and usually get less visible over time.⁵


Your changing body shape will mean that you will change clothing size more quickly and you may need to get new sports clothing more frequently. Making sure that you are comfortable in the clothing you wear for cricket training/matches will ensure that you enjoy being active more. Choosing the right sports bra for you is discussed in section 4 (Breast Health).

BODY HAIR - One sign of puberty is hair growing where it didn't before; for girls, this is under their arms and in their pubic areas⁴. This is perfectly natural, and the amount of hair will vary from girl to girl. Some girls may choose to remove some of this hair for personal preference reasons, however, not all girls choose to remove hair that starts to grow during puberty, and it is your choice.

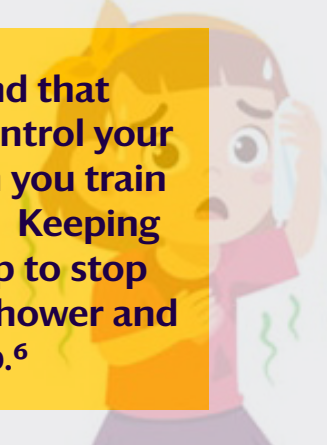
If this is something you are considering doing, speak to a trusted person (parent, sister or other relative) for guidance about taking this step.

⁴KidsHealth - [KidsHealth - Puberty](#)

⁵NHS - [Stretch marks - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)



ACNE - Acne (or pimples) is triggered by puberty hormones and can stick around during your teenage years. If you have concerns about acne, your GP will be able to offer some suggestions to help it clear up.⁴



SWEAT AND BODY ODOUR - As you go through puberty you may find that you sweat more as your sweat glands produce more sweat to help control your body's temperature. You may find that you start to sweat more when you train and play cricket - sweating helps to keep you cool when you exercise. Keeping the areas that you sweat, such as your armpits, clean and dry will help to stop any body odour from developing. It is important to regularly bathe/shower and wear clean clothes. Using deodorant and antiperspirant can also help.⁶

MENSTRUATION - Approximately two years after your first symptoms of puberty, you may have your first period. The most common age for girls to have their first period is at the age of 12, but it can start anywhere between the ages of 8 and 17 - everyone is different!⁷ If you haven't started your period by the age of 15, it is best to speak to your GP to discuss this - there could be a number of reasons for this. Your period is part of a cycle that will be discussed in the next section.

[Click here](#) to listen to Sophia Dunkley (ECB and South East Stars) asking a professional about starting your period.

DISCHARGE - Discharge is a fluid that comes from the vagina, which you might notice on your underwear or when you go to the toilet. It serves an important purpose to clean the vagina, and helps to prevent and fight infections. This is another change that happens in your body when you start puberty and is completely normal. If you are worried about this being uncomfortable, you could wear a pantiliner.

[Click here](#) for more information about discharge.

For more information about puberty, [click here](#).

⁶Childline - <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/you-your-body/puberty/puberty-body/>

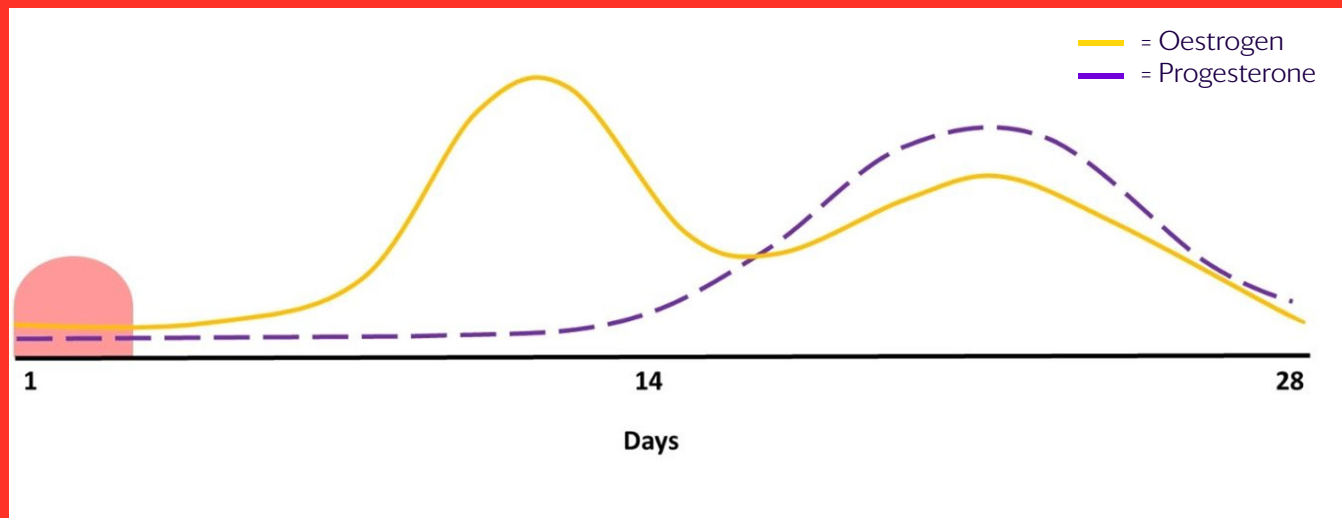
⁷NHS - [Starting your periods - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

3. OVERVIEW OF MENSTRUATION

The Menstrual Cycle

The menstrual cycle is a recurring process experienced by women and girls which usually takes around 28 days (but can range from 21-35 days). During this cycle, the lining of the uterus is prepared for pregnancy. If pregnancy does not occur, the lining is shed - this is known as menstruation⁸, or (more generally) as getting your period.

Several hormones are involved in this.



The first day of the cycle is the day your period (also known as menstruation) starts, and this typically lasts for around 3-7 days. Your period, or menstrual blood, is made up of blood, vaginal discharge, and some of the lining of the uterus which is shed and passes out of the vagina. After menstruation, the lining of the uterus builds up again and the cycle repeats.⁸

[Click here](#) to hear a question from Katie Levick (North Diamonds) about how much blood you lose on your period.

If you have concerns about how frequently you need to change your sanitary products or how 'heavy' your period is, you should speak to your GP.

⁸BBC - [The role of reproductive hormones in the menstrual cycle](#) - Hormones in human reproduction - AQA - GCSE Combined Science Revision - AQA Trilogy - BBC Bitesize

Pre-Menstrual Syndrome (PMS)

Throughout your menstrual cycle, you have different levels of hormones in your body and this can have some side effects. Pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS) is the name for the common feelings you may have before your period starts.

Symptoms include⁹:

- Mood swings/getting easily annoyed
- Crying or feeling sad all of a sudden
- Not being able to concentrate
- Feeling really tired
- Your breasts feeling sore
- Your stomach feeling really full or bloated
- Cramping in the stomach area
- Temporary weight gain
- Headaches

In section 5, we will look at some tips for coping with PMS.

Menstruation Symptoms

The most obvious sign of your period is that menstrual blood will start coming out of your vagina, and you may notice it in your underwear or when you go to the toilet.

Alongside this, you may continue to experience the same symptoms as before your period starts, during the PMS phase, such as cramps and headaches.

If any of these symptoms start to affect your daily life (they are more than just a bit of an annoyance), you should speak to a trusted adult or your GP as there are several ways to help alleviate them.

Period Products

There are a variety of products available to use when you get your period. You may wish to use pads for your first few periods as other products can take some getting used to. You can experiment until you find the best product for you and you may find that you prefer to use a combination of products over the course of your period, for example a sanitary towel over night but a tampon during physical activity.

Here is some information about the different types of products available¹⁰:

Sanitary Towels ('Pads')

Strips of padding that have a sticky side that you attach to your underwear to hold them in place - one side of the pad is made of an absorbent material that soaks up the blood.

Often used by girls when they first start their periods as they are easy to use and come in many sizes and absorbencies (meaning how much menstrual blood they can take in).



You should change these every 4 to 6 hours, depending on how heavy your period is. You can't flush pads down the toilet so you should wrap them up and put them in the bin.

Tampons

Small tubes of cotton wool that you insert into your vagina to absorb the blood before it comes out of your body, with a string at one end which you pull to remove.



If the tampon is inserted correctly, you shouldn't be able to feel it. If you can feel it or it hurts, it might not be inserted properly. [Click here](#) for a guide on how to insert a tampon.

There are different levels of absorbance (for light, medium and heavy periods) and it is important that you choose the right one for you - you can change which type you use throughout your period as the amount of menstrual blood you lose changes.

You should change your tampon regularly (every 4 hours, or sooner depending on how heavy your periods are). Don't forget to remove your tampon when your period ends.

If you are unable to remove the tampon, don't panic!
You can speak to a trusted adult for advice or contact your local surgery and they will be able to help you.

Menstrual Cups

Made from medical-grade silicone, these are around 2 inches in size and are put inside the vagina to collect the blood in a cup (rather than absorbing it like a tampon would).

These are reusable which can make them cheaper (in the long run) and more environmentally friendly. Menstrual cups should be emptied and cleaned every 4 to 6 hours.

It is important that you wash your hands and your menstrual cup before each use.



Period Pants

Worn just like everyday underwear, they absorb menstrual blood.

Period pants are reusable but you will need a few pairs to ensure you have enough to get you through your period. These should be changed every 4 to 6 hours, depending on your period. You will also need access to a washing machine to wash them.

Some girls use these as their only period product, while others will use them in combination with other products to help them feel more confident (for example on days with heavy bleeding).

Period pants can be expensive but there are lots of different places you can buy them from so you can compare prices and find the best ones for you.



Many girls use a combination of period products while they are menstruating - you should use whichever products that *you* find most comfortable, and that give you the confidence to carry out your normal activities (like going to school and playing cricket) when you are on your period.

Toxic Shock Syndrome

There is a rare risk associated with products that you insert into your vagina (tampons and menstrual cups) called toxic shock syndrome (TSS). TSS is caused by bacteria entering your body and releasing harmful toxins, and can happen when you use tampons and menstrual cups if you do not change them regularly enough¹⁰.

You can help to prevent TSS by¹⁰:

- Washing your hands before and after using your product
- Washing your menstrual cup before each use
- Changing your product regularly (approximately every 4 hours)
- Making sure you only have one tampon or menstrual cup in your vagina at a time
- Making sure you remember to remove your tampon or menstrual cup when your period has ended

For more information about period products and TSS, [click here](#).

Irregular Periods/Symptoms

Your periods may be irregular when they first start (they may not arrive when you expect them to), but as your body starts to adjust to the hormones, they will become more regular. If your periods become shorter, heavier or more irregular, more sporadic (you can't predict when they will start), the gaps between them get longer, or they stop completely, you should discuss this with your GP.

If you have any concerns about going through puberty or menstruation you should talk to a trusted person (like a parent, guardian, older sibling, school nurse) or speak to your GP. If you feel uncomfortable speaking to a male medical professional (doctor or nurse) about this, you can request to see a female medical professional.

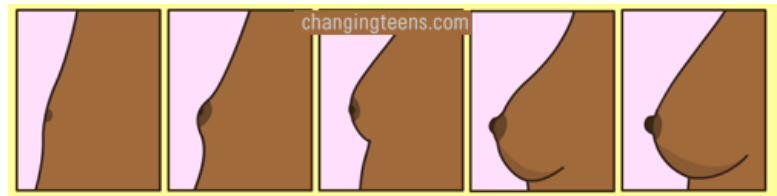
4. BREAST HEALTH

Breast Development

One way in which your body will change shape through puberty is the development of breasts. The first sign of breast development is the formation of breast buds, which are small mounds of tissue underneath the nipples.

Sometimes, one breast bud will appear before the other, or one may grow more quickly than the other - this is completely normal and breasts are rarely symmetrical. As your breasts grow, you may notice that your nipple(s) are inverted (or they may have always been inverted). It is likely that the nipples will become normal as you progress through puberty.

You may find that as your breasts grow and develop, they feel sore, tingly, itchy or painful - this is also a normal sign of breast growth⁹. You may also notice stretch marks (as described in the overview of puberty section), which are very common and will fade over time⁸.



[Image credit: ChangingTeens]

For more information about breast development, [click here](#).

Breast Health

For female athletes, breast health is about:

- Making sure that your breasts are well supported in a good fitting sports-bra
- Protecting your breasts from getting injured and making sure they are properly cared for if they are injured
- Being aware of what your normal breast is like

During puberty, your breasts are developing. To maximise breast health throughout the lifespan, it is important that all adolescent females monitor their breast development and know how their 'normal' breasts feel and look. This can be done by simply looking and feeling when you are washing and drying yourself.

¹¹Always - Breast Development During Puberty (always.co.uk)

Can you injure your breasts?

Breasts are soft and have a rich blood supply, and so they can be injured when they experience direct impact forces (such as being hit by a hard cricket ball). These types of injuries will result in breast pain, bruising and swelling that can last for one to two weeks.

If you experience a breast injury, such as being hit with a cricket ball, you may wish to seek medical advice if you or your parents feel it is a bad injury, as these symptoms can be treated in the same way as other soft tissue injuries (for example rolling your ankle or pulling a muscle).

Any injuries should be monitored to see that the breast tissue returns to normal (the swelling goes down and the bruising disappears). If you are worried about how long your body is taking to recover from an injury, you can talk to your doctor about this.

It is important that young female cricket players:

- Regularly check your breasts so you know what your 'normal' breasts look and feel like
- Know that breast injuries can occur
- Report breast injuries to your doctor if you are concerned

Breast Cancer

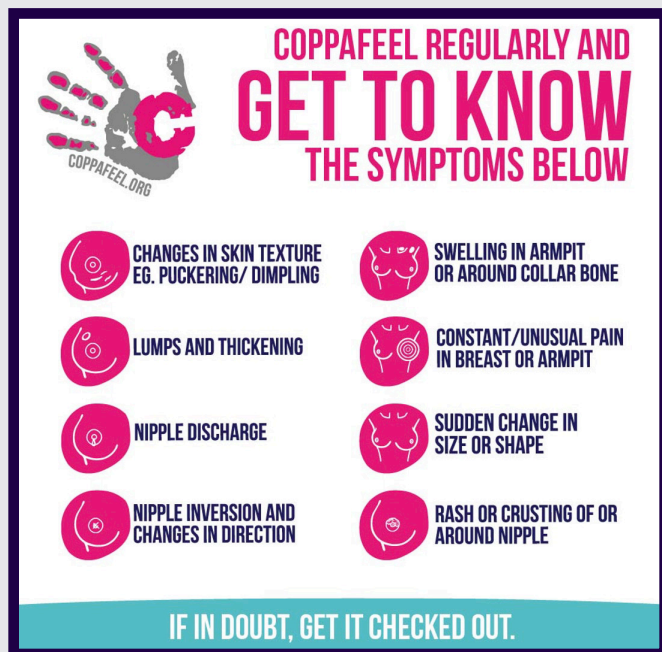
Breast cancer in teenagers is extremely rare but it is important that you become familiar with what 'normal' is like for your breasts.

Rapid breast growth is a normal part of puberty.

Take a look at the image on the right showing some of the symptoms of breast cancer.

If you are concerned about any changes to your breasts, here is some useful advice from the Teenage Cancer Trust that you can follow:

[I think I have cancer | Teenage Cancer Trust.](#)



COPPAFEEL REGULARLY AND GET TO KNOW THE SYMPTOMS BELOW

CHANGES IN SKIN TEXTURE
EG. PUCKERING/ DIMPLING

SWELLING IN ARMPIT
OR AROUND COLLAR BONE

LUMPS AND THICKENING

CONSTANT/UNUSUAL PAIN
IN BREAST OR ARMPIT

NIPPLE DISCHARGE

SUDDEN CHANGE IN
SIZE OR SHAPE

NIPPLE INVERSION AND
CHANGES IN DIRECTION

RASH OR CRUSTING OF OR
AROUND NIPPLE

IF IN DOUBT, GET IT CHECKED OUT.

Sports Bras

A sports bra is an essential piece of sporting equipment for female cricket players. Wearing the correct sports bra for you, that is fitted correctly and comfortable, can help to maximise your cricket performance.

Research of elite international female cricket players found the majority did not know how to tell if their sports bras provided high support, fit correctly, or were supportive enough for their breasts.

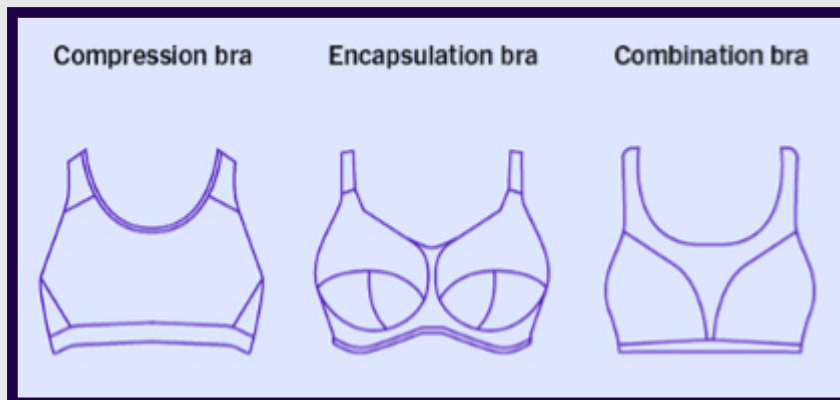
[Click here](#) to discover what research revealed about these players' breast health.

High support sports bras are recommended for cricketers due to the running required across all aspects of cricket (batting, bowling and fielding), as well as the vigorous arm movements. Research has shown that high support sports bras are very effective at alleviating or resolving breast pain associated with excessive breast movement.

Types of Sports Bras

There are three basic designs of sports bras available:

1. **Compression (crop top) style** - These are usually pullover style bras that compress breasts to the chest to limit movement during exercise, offering light to medium support⁹. These are usually recommended for lower-impact exercise.
2. **Encapsulation style** - These fit more like a standard bra, with breasts held in separate cups. Encapsulation sports bras limit breast movement in all directions and are suitable for higher-impact exercise such as cricket. This style of sports bra is recommended for women and girls with larger cup sizes.
3. **Hybrid style** - this style of bra is a combination of the compression and encapsulation styles. The bra looks like a crop top from the outside but on the inside there will be two separate cups for each breast providing more support. This style of bra is also recommended for high impact exercise such as cricket, and for women and girls with larger cup sizes.



Checking Your Sports Bra Fits

Ensuring that your sports bra fits you well is important for breast health. Usually, you will be the same size in regular bras as you are in sports bras, so that would be a good size to try first.

Here are three parts of your sports bra that you should check fit you well:

1. **Straps** - the sports bra should be snug but not dig in or cause discomfort, you should be able to fit two fingers between the straps and your shoulders.

2. **Cups** - if any of your breast spills out of the sports bra then it is too small, both compression and encapsulation sports bras should cover the entire breast⁹. If there is wrinkling in the fabric, or there are large gaps between the bra and your breast, then the cup size is too large.

3. **Band** - the band should fit flat against your ribs without feeling restrictive (or digging in), you can check the tightness by taking a deep breath to see if you feel any discomfort, if the sports bra rides up when you lift your hands above your head then the bra is too big⁹, wearing a bra that is too tight for extended periods can cause discomfort and skin irritation.

When you try on a sports bra, try to recreate some of the movements you will perform in cricket (your bowling action or overarm throwing) to ensure that you feel comfortable in it.

You can check the design, fit and support of your own sports bra by using this free web-based app developed by the world leading researchers on Breast Health for female athletes, Breast Research Australia. [Click here](#) or on the image below to see a Sports Bra Tool.



Click on the following links to hear questions asked by professional cricketers across the UK about sports bras:

Do you have to wear a sports bra if you have small breasts?

- Beth Langston
(Northern Diamonds)

What are the risks of not wearing a sports bra?

- Kelly Castle
(Sunrisers)

How do you prevent chafing, particularly in warm weather?

- Issy Wong
(Central Sparks)

Menstruation Facts

There are often myths around menstruation. Here are some common facts to help debunk those myths:

Periods are not shameful - Periods are totally normal, and something that almost all women and girls experience. Whilst you may be nervous to talk about your period with other people, it does not mean that periods are shameful, or that you should not discuss periods.

People cannot tell when you are menstruating - Unless you tell them, they will not know you are menstruating!

You can exercise whilst menstruating - As discussed in section 1, there are a lot of benefits to playing cricket (and exercising in general), and these are still true when you are on your period. Unless you are greatly affected by PMS/menstruation symptoms, you will likely feel better after you exercise when you are on your period.

Staying Positive and Promoting Positive Mental Wellbeing

It is important to remember that all girls will experience a lot of changes to their body during puberty and that you are not alone if you have any worries or are anxious about this.

This resource should have helped you to understand the changes you will go through and how these could affect you when you are playing cricket. You deserve to feel confident and not let puberty get in the way of you enjoying your hobbies.

The MCCF and Opening Up Cricket have put together an 'Introduction to Mental Wellbeing for Young Cricketers' resource. [Click here](#) to access this to explore the wider topic of mental wellbeing and techniques that you can use to promote positive mental wellbeing in cricket and beyond.

6. FURTHER SUPPORT

If you have concerns about any of the topics in this resource, you should speak to your GP.

Here are some links to further information that you may find useful:

- **Benefits of exercise for young people** - [Exercise for children and young people | Great Ormond Street Hospital \(gosh.nhs.uk\)](#)
- **Puberty** - [Puberty and your body | Childline](#)
- **Periods** - [Periods - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)
- **Period Products** - [Choosing period products | NHS inform](#)
- **Sports Bras (finding the right size for you)** - [Sports Bra Tool](#)

For information about sexual health, visit these websites or your local sexual health clinic.

- **Sexual Health advice** - [Where can I get sexual health advice, now? - NHS](#)
- **Contraception** - [NHS Contraception Guide](#)

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO:

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The ECB Women's Health Group



TRANSFORMING
LIVES
THROUGH
CRICKET



FOUNDATION



MCC Foundation - Transforming Lives Through Cricket since 1993

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