



# Puberty, Autism and PDA (Part 1: Periods)



A resource to support the webinar delivered  
by Nicola Reekie & Julia Daunt

August 2023 for  
The PDA Space Portal  
([www.thepdaspacespace.com](http://www.thepdaspacespace.com))

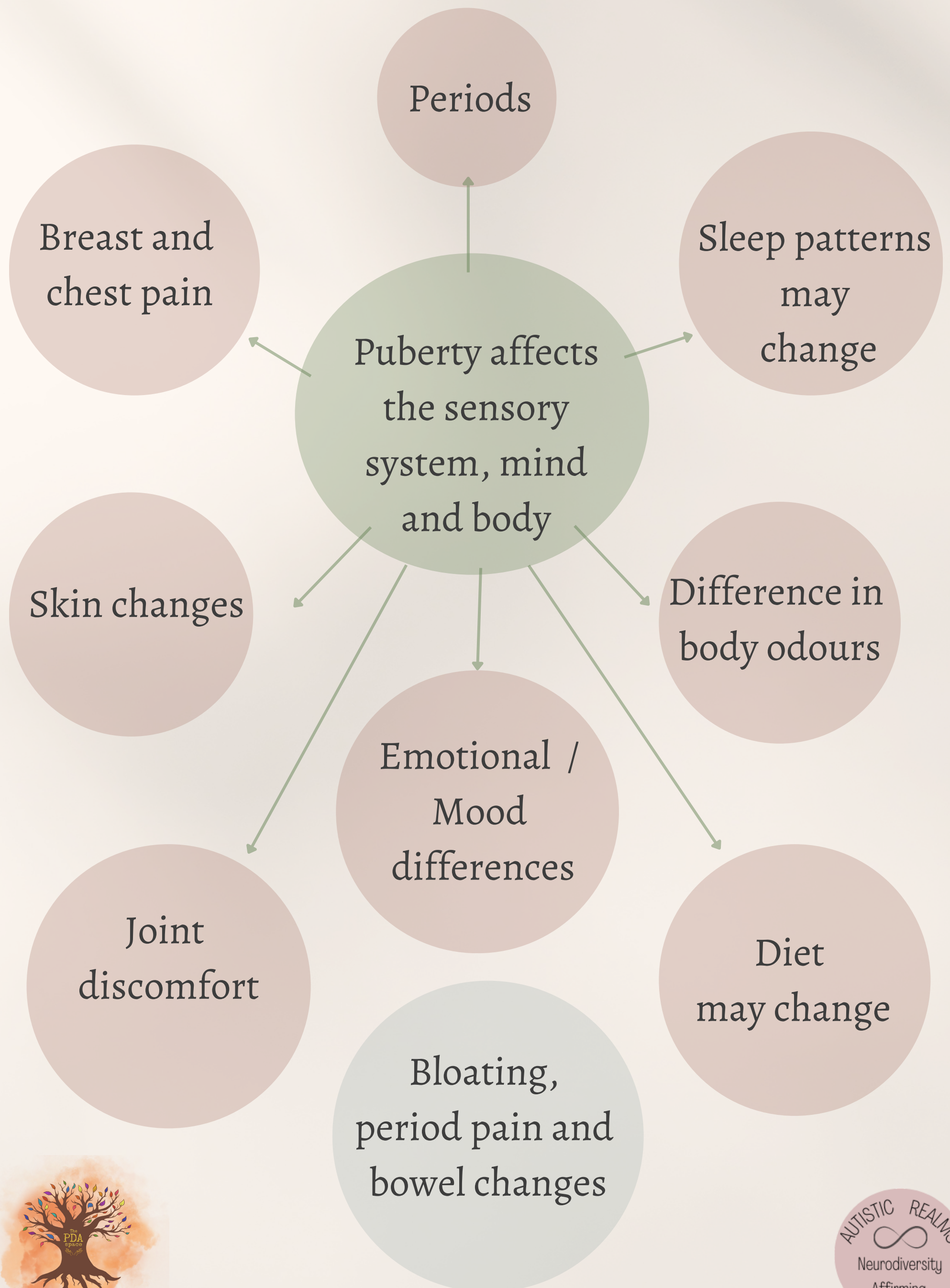
Created by Helen Edgar



# Puberty

Puberty is a time of great change, physically and emotionally. If you are neurodivergent, it can be even more challenging. PDA can bring additional difficulties as changes are outside of the young person's control, affecting the sensory system and mental and physical health. It can be a confusing time, resulting in heightened emotional responses.

The changes that come with puberty can make life more challenging for PDAers. This guide will provide some ideas to help make this transitional time a bit easier for your young person and everyone in your family.



# Supporting Young People

It is important to talk to your young person as openly as possible. Rather than building up to a big 'Talk'. Discuss things as situations arise naturally in your home.

Uncertainty contributes to anxiety, which can escalate demand avoidance. This may lead to your young person trying to gain more control over situations to feel safe.

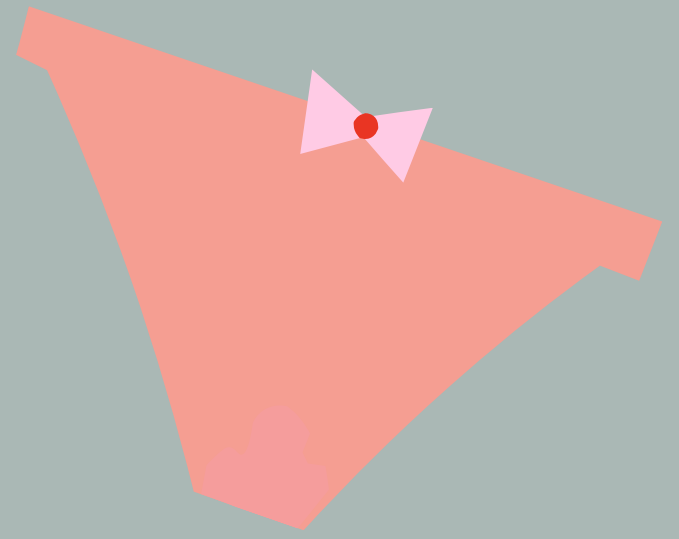
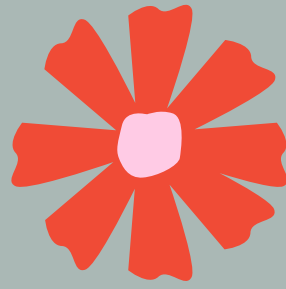
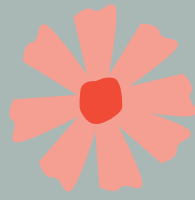
Reducing uncertainty and increasing understanding of what will happen in puberty will help make this a more comfortable time for your young person and everyone in your family.

The following pages list some ideas that we hope will support your young person:

1. Talk openly and share the positives and reasons why we go through puberty.
2. Give the opportunity to ask questions and answer honestly in as much detail as possible.
3. Let them explore a range of period products, e.g., sanitary towels, menstrual cups, tampons and period pants. The more familiar they are with the practicalities of using and changing pads and the sensory feel of period pants (or whatever they feel comfortable with), the more confident they will feel when needing to use them.

If your young person is neurodivergent, they may be hyper or hypo-sensitive to certain sensory input. The hormonal changes of puberty will impact the sensory system; textures/scents/tastes they used to tolerate or enjoy may start to change. This can significantly affect a young person and is important to talk about and consider. Seamless pants/bras and crop tops may help with sensory discomfort of clothes.





# How to help reduce anxiety about periods

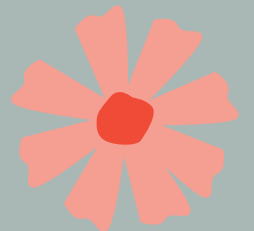
## TIP 1:

Start small. Talk with your young person about puberty and menstruation as things come up in everyday life. Normalize it. It's nothing to be ashamed of; every person goes through puberty.



## TIP 2:

Create a bag of period products for your young person to explore and practise with before puberty even starts to help ease anxiety and so they are familiar and confident using them.



## TIP 3:

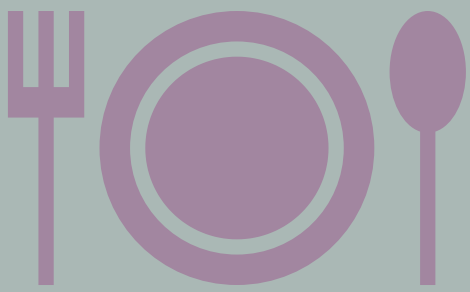
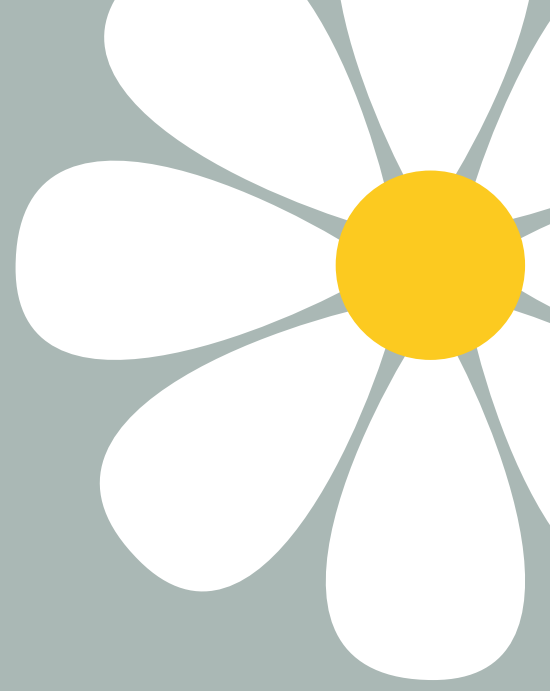
Discuss everything in as much detail as your young person needs. The more they know and understand the less anxious they will be and more positive experience they will have.



Remember increasing understanding and knowledge about puberty will help lessen anxiety and help make life a bit easier. Young people need specific details, especially if they are autistic. Looking at books and photos and exploring different things (e.g., by practising putting pads on) can help consolidate understanding and make it a more positive experience.



# Period Self Care



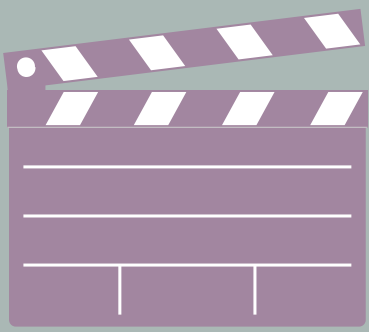
**Eat your  
fave food**



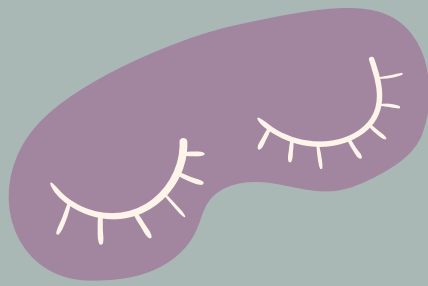
**Relax in your  
own way**



**Do Light  
Stretches**



**Watch your  
fave Movies**



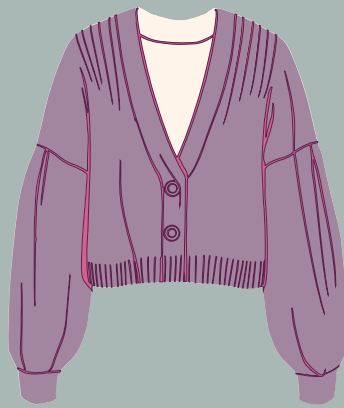
**Prioritise  
Sleep and Rest**



**Chat to friends**



**Weighted blankets may  
help reduce anxiety**



**Wear Comfy  
Clothes**



**Sensory toys may  
help**



# Period Tracker

## SYMPTOMS

	Fatigue
	Headache
	Cramps
	Cravings
	Spotting
	Acne

## FLOW

Light	👉	👉	👉	👉	👉
Medium	👉	👉	👉	👉	👉
Heavy	👉	👉	👉	👉	👉

## LENGTH OF CYCLE

<b>JAN</b> .....	<b>FEB</b> .....	<b>MAR</b> .....
<b>APR</b> .....	<b>MAY</b> .....	<b>JUN</b> .....
<b>JUL</b> .....	<b>AUG</b> .....	<b>SEP</b> .....
<b>OCT</b> .....	<b>NOV</b> .....	<b>DEC</b> .....

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Periods can be unpredictable, especially during teenage years so it is important to also emphasise that they may be irregular but it will still be valuable to record this.

Knowing when your period may happen will help to reduce uncertainty and anxiety. Using a period tracker app or diary can help give a sense of autonomy and control so you can prepare and plan for events easier.



# Lowering Demands

Acknowledge their emotions and give time and space for your young person to relax in their own way when needed.

Put a bin in the bathroom and ensure sanitary products are in easy reach. Leave bags open for used products to make this process easier if needed.

Be a positive role model and talk about emotions, body feelings and sensory challenges and how you manage.

Remember puberty doesn't last forever & it is your body's way of preparing for the next stage in life.

Puberty can also be a time to strengthen your relationships as you journey through this together as a family.



# Signposting

1

[www.thepdaspace.com](http://www.thepdaspace.com)

Family support workshops, webinars, coaching and online peer support groups

2

[www.autismunderstood.co.uk](http://www.autismunderstood.co.uk)

Website designed by autistic young people, for autistic people

3

[www.autisticparentsuk.org](http://www.autisticparentsuk.org)

Autistic Parent network offering peer support

4

[www.pdasociety.org.uk](http://www.pdasociety.org.uk)

PDA Society UK

5

[www.mymyselfandpda.com](http://www.mymyselfandpda.com)

Julia Daunt's website - PDA, ADHD advocate & writer

6

[www.autisticrealms.com](http://www.autisticrealms.com)

Helen Edgar's website - Autism/ education and mental health articles and resources

*Please seek professional advice if needed.*







A free community resource  
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Created for  
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Autistic Realms

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