

Why care about periods?

Knowing about your period (and menstrual cycle) will help you understand how your body works. This can help make your life easier when it comes to periods.



What is a period?

A period, also known as menstruation, is a bleed that comes out of the vagina roughly once a month. Periods can last for around 2-7 days.

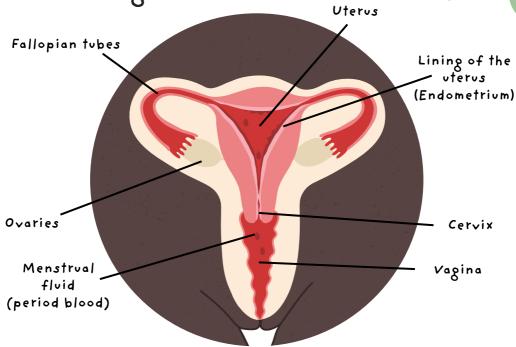
What is a period? Periods are the shedding of the lining of the uterus in response to hormonal changes.

The bleed that comes out is menstrual fluid containing blood and cells from the lining of the uterus.

The bleed can vary in colour and consistency throughout the period. They are different for everybody but are usually heavier over the first day or two than towards the end.

Everyone's experience of their period is different.

Periods are the shedding of the lining of the uterus



I haven't got my period yet, what's wrong with me?

People usually get their first period between the ages of 8-16. Everyone develops at different rates. If you're concerned then it's a good idea to speak to a doctor.

When does it end?

People can get their periods up until menopause which usually occurs between the ages of 45-55.

There may be other times throughout a person's life when they don't get their period. For example, during pregnancy.

Remember: Periods are NOT gross or Shameful!



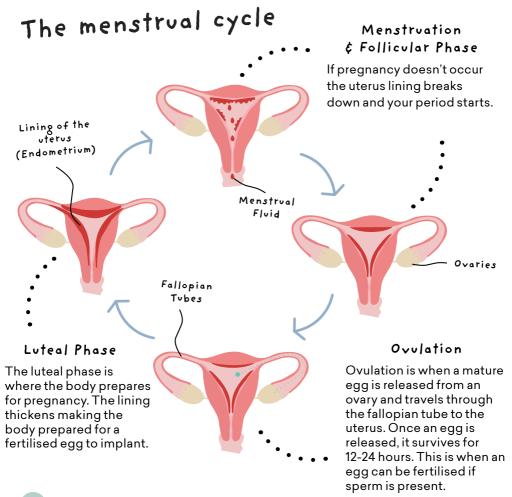
why do I get periods?

Periods are part of a menstrual cycle, which is a hormonal and physical cycle that the body usually goes through in preparation for pregnancy – often happening every 21-35 days (for most people about once a month).

The menstrual cycle (including your period) usually starts between the ages of 8 to 16.



The first day of your period = the first day of your menstrual cycle.



What does a period feel like?

Periods may be uncomfortable but they shouldn't be painful. If you're experiencing pain it's important to see a doctor.

The bleed usually doesn't feel like anything although you may feel some dampness in your underwear.

Periods don't necessarily hurt but some people will get cramps, feel sick or experience pain in their tummy or lower back.

Many people experience symptoms that appear in the days leading up to a period. Symptoms can be physical (e.g. sore breasts, cramping, diarrhoea, tiredness, headaches) or emotional (e.g. anxiety, irritability, sadness).

If you are experiencing severe mood swings leading up to your period or are concerned about your experience then it can help to see a doctor to discuss treatment options.

How can I manage pain during periods?

Feeling uncomfortable in your lower abdomen (below your belly button) can be a normal part of periods. As the lining of the uterus is shed, the uterus contracts to help expel the period. These contractions are known as menstrual cramps or period pain.

There are many options for managing menstrual cramps, including over-the-counter pain medication (e.g. ibuprofen), heat pack and movement.

You should see a doctor for advice if: the pain is severe, lasts beyond the first few days of your period, does not lessen with pain medication or is significantly affecting your daily life.

It is not 'normal' to have to miss school or work on a regular basis due to period pain, this pain could be managed with medical support.

Tip: Heat packs or hot water bottles can help with cramp pain.



Periods and hygiene

It's a good idea to try to shower daily when you're on your period (remove your tampon, pad etc.). Period blood can give off a smell over time so washing regularly will help manage this.

You shouldn't feel any shame about period blood, it's totally normal and not dirty.

Try to wear clean clothes and underwear each day. Change your pad, tampon or menstrual cup regularly throughout the day.

Every time you insert or remove a tampon, pad or menstrual cup make sure you wash your hands before and after.

Washing your vulva

Only use water or plain unscented soap to wash the outside part of your genitals - the vulva.

Also, you don't ever need to get soap inside your vagina. Trust us on this one!

Don't use shower gels, or perfumed products around this area or inside the vagina, this can irritate the skin. Due to the sensitivity of this area it's best to dry by patting gently.









What about discharge?

Throughout the menstrual cycle, the cervix produces mucus, often called discharge. Discharge is fluid produced by glands in the vagina. It helps keep the vagina lubricated and removes bacteria, keeping the vagina healthy. Discharge can be clear to milky white and it can change in colour and texture throughout the menstrual cycle.

Around the time of ovulation, your discharge is likely to be clear and stretchy or clear and watery. Vaginal discharge is normal and healthy. It does not indicate sexual thoughts or activity. Some people will produce large amounts whilst others may not notice any.

If you notice a change in colour, smell or quantity compared to what is normal for you, this could indicate an infection and you should see a doctor.

Vaginal discharge is normal and healthy.





Period products

There are many different options when it comes to period products and you might want to use a range of them.

The best period products to use are those that works well for you.

They can usually be bought from supermarkets, chemists or purchased online.

Some period products can be worn while swimming such as a tampon, menstrual cup or period swimwear.

Disposable pads

Pads are pretty easy to use. They attach inside underwear with an adhesive strip, the pad is used to catch and absorb menstrual blood. Some have wings that wrap around underwear to help keep them in place. Some are extra-long and/or thick for use overnight.

Pads should be changed often, at least once every 6 hours, but this depends on flow. If any moisture is felt, the pad should be changed. Used pads should be rolled up and placed in the wrapper from the new pad or wrapped in toilet paper and placed in the bin. Most public toilets have special sanitary bins for used pads and tampons. Never flush a pad down the toilet.





Tampons

Tampons are inserted into the vagina to absorb period blood. They are removed by pulling the tampon strings. Tampons can take some time to get right so practice helps. Some tampons also come with an applicator to help with insertion.

They are usually made from cotton and come in various sizes to absorb different flow. The safest way to use tampons is to always use the lowest absorbency that will manage your flow. For example, use a 'mini' tampon if you have a light period.

Tampons should not be kept in for more than 8 hours. Used tampons should be wrapped in toilet paper and placed in the bin. Most public toilets have special sanitary bins for used pads and tampons. Never flush a tampon down the toilet.

It's easier to insert tampons when you take deep breaths and relax! It's a good idea to start with a 'mini tampon', using a smaller size can make insertion easier.

If your tampon is leaking it might be that it's in too long or you need a tampon with higher absorbency like a 'maxi' or 'super' tampon.





How to insert a tampon

- 1. Wash your hands in water with mild soap. Unwrap the cover of the tampon. You'll see a bit of string at the end, loosen it before you insert the tampon.
- It can be helpful to use your other hand to gently hold your labia apart. Your vagina is on an angle so it can help insertion to push your hips forward and aim the tampon towards your back. It can also help to have a leg up on a chair while inserting the tampon.
- Push the tampon inside your vagina, leaving the string dangling out so that you can take it out later. If the tampon isn't far enough inside it can cause discomfort. You can use your pointer finger to push it the rest of the way in.
- To remove your tampon, wash your hands and pull the string. If you can't see the string that's OK, you'll need to feel around for it.



Period underwear

Period underwear are reusable underwear that are designed to absorb period blood and other vaginal discharge. They are specially designed to take moisture away from the surface, control odour and absorb a large amount of liquid (some designed for heavy flow can hold up to 5 teaspoons – a 'super' tampon can hold 2 teaspoons).

Cleaning period underwear

It is important to rinse period underwear as soon as possible for hygiene purposes and to minimise staining. Period underwear can be washed by hand or in a washing machine.

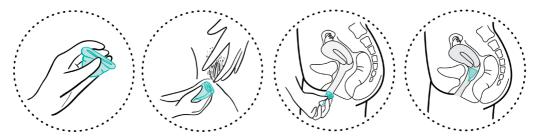
Always rinse and wash period underwear with cold water as hot water will cause the blood to set and stain the fabric (you can put them in a bucket of cold water overnight to soak before washing).

Once rinsed, period underwear can be washed by hand or put in the washing machine with other washing and air dried, ideally outside in the sun when possible.

Menstrual cups

Menstrual cups are flexible silicon cups that are inserted into the vagina to catch period blood. They easily fold to help with insertion and are removed by gently breaking the seal between the cup and vagina or squeezing the base of the cup and pulling it out. If the stem of the cup is too long and sticks out of the vagina, you can trim it shorter.

How to insert a menstrual cup



- 1. Wash your hands in water with mild soap.
- 2. Find a relaxed position such as sitting on the toilet or squatting in the shower.
- 3. Fold your cup to the smallest size you can, there's lots of tips online for different types of folds.
- 4. Guide the folded cup with the rim first into the vagina. It can be helpful to use your other hand to gently hold your labia apart.
- 5. The cup should be inside your vagina. Once inserted, give the stem a very gentle tug to ensure that your cup is properly in place and has formed a suction-like seal around the walls of your vagina.

Cleaning menstrual cups

Before using a menstrual cup for the first time it should be sterilised in boiling water. Make sure there is enough water that the cup doesn't sit on the bottom and burn. Boil for 5–7 minutes.

During a period, menstrual cups can be removed gently, emptied into the toilet and washed with warm soapy water before being reinserted. At the end of a period, menstrual cups need to be sterilised in boiling water and dried thoroughly before being stored in the fabric bag they were purchased in. Wash hands before and after using a menstrual cup.

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