

## Periods - Information for young people who menstruate

I'm a doctor working in a GP surgery. I have talked to lots of young people with questions about periods. So I've written this as a guide for those aged 12-18 and their adults. It will talk about periods, what's normal, menstrual products and what might mean you need to talk to someone for some help. I hope it helps you!!



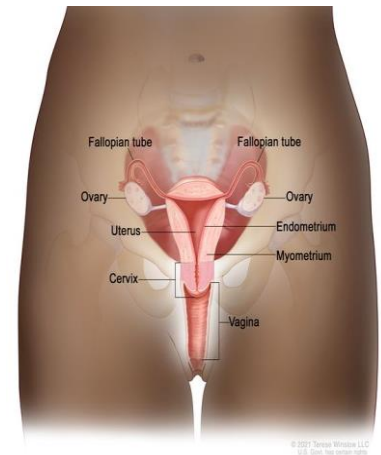
### Why do we have periods?

Menstruation (also called a period) is **normal** and healthy. It is bleeding from the vagina. This happens after the lining of the uterus thickens and an egg is released - this is to prepare the body for pregnancy. However, once there is no pregnancy the body needs to get rid of the lining of the uterus and this comes away as a period. This happens regularly - usually once a month.

### What is normal?

There is a HUGE range of normal when it comes to menstruation! What you experience may not be the same as your mum, sister or friends.

- Average cycle length (days between first day of one period to the first day of the next period) is 28 days but this can be anything from 21-35 days (even longer when the periods first start).
- Average period length (days you menstruate) is 4 days but this can vary from 1-10 days.
- Average age to start periods is 12 years old but this can range from 8 - 15 years old.
- Periods stop around the age of 50 years old.



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## Period blood



### How much blood should I lose?

This is different from person to person - some people have very light bleeding called spotting and this may be pale pink or brown, some people have quite heavy, red bleeding, even with clots. This can all be normal.

### Should it hurt?

Some people have no pain, a few have a lot of pain - most people have some mild pain - all of this can be normal. Period pain is usually felt in the lower tummy or back and can feel crampy. It can make people feel sick.

If you have pain things that can help are paracetamol and ibuprofen (medicine your adult can give you), hot water bottles or wheat bags and taking it easy for a few days.

### How can I manage the blood?

There are loads of choices for menstrual products.

- Pads - can be single use or washable, goes inside your pants.
- Period pants - special pants made to absorb blood flow, and can be washed and re-used.
- Tampons - single use, goes inside the vagina.
- Moon cup - reusable , goes inside the vagina.



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Some of these can be used together, e.g. tampons and pad, pad and period pants. Menstrual products need changing every 2-3 hours. How you choose to manage the blood is up to you.

### **Can a tampon or moon cup get lost inside my body?**

No, it is not possible. The tampon or moon cup stays inside your vagina as the opening of the uterus (called the cervical os) is far too tiny for them to go through.



### **What if there's too much blood or pain?**

Some people find that the blood flow is really heavy and/or that they have a lot of pain that is difficult to cope with. This can be more common in teenage years and does not usually mean anything is wrong - this may get better as you get older. Signs that your periods are more troublesome than they should be include:

- A tampon or pad not lasting more than an hour
- Blood clots bigger than a 1 penny piece
- Feeling dizzy or faint - this can be a sign of anaemia (low blood iron levels)
- Needing to miss school or other important activities
- Vomiting
- Pain not controlled with paracetamol and ibuprofen
- Bleeding between periods

If you have any of these then please ask for help!

### **What is Pre Menstrual Syndrome?**

Some people find that they feel bloated, have sore breasts and feel more emotional or moody than usual a few days before your period. Being sure you rest, drink plenty of water and eating healthily can help.

It is sensible to confide in someone you trust that you are feeling like this and talk through any negative feelings you may be having. If you are struggling with this then please get help!

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## Who can help?



Trusted adults and your own friends can help with any questions you may have. If you are experiencing problems with periods you can talk to a nurse or doctor at your GP surgery.

There are options to help heavy or painful bleeding. These include medicines to slow bleeding taken for a few days of the month or hormonal contraceptive pills (containing oestrogen and/or progesterone) taken more regularly. The aim of these medicines is to slow bleeding and reduce pain.

## If you need to see a doctor or nurse

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Talk to a trusted adult who can help you make an appointment at the GP surgery that you are registered with. If you prefer the doctor or nurse to be a woman you can request that.



### **What will the doctor or nurse ask?**

They will ask all about your periods - when they started, how often they come, how long they last and why they are difficult. Keeping a diary or a period tracking app to show them when you go to your appointment is helpful.

They will also want to know about your general health, any medications you take and if you are allergic to anything. They may measure your weight and height - this is nothing to be worried about; it is simply so any medicines can be

prescribed safely.

### **Can I bring someone with me to see the doctor or nurse?**

You can - many teenagers bring a parent or friend for support. This is helpful so you have someone else to listen to what is said as it's easy to forget things!

### **Will anyone know I've been to the GP surgery?**

Usually the answer to this is no. If you are under 18 doctors and nurses still have to treat your information in a confidential manner - this means not telling anyone without your permission. However, if we think someone under the age of 18 may be in danger or vulnerable we have to share your information - we would try to tell you before doing so. This would only be with other adults, no one will tell your friends!

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References [www.periodpositive.com](http://www.periodpositive.com) accessed Jan 2023 [www.healthline.com](http://www.healthline.com) accessed Jan 2023 [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org) accessed Jan 2023

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