

changes During Puberty

Menstruation

Grades
4th & 5th

MENSTRUATION

Puberty is the time in your life where you are leaving behind being a little girl and are becoming a woman. Menstruation - having periods - is part of the female reproductive cycle that starts when girls become sexually mature at the time of puberty.

No one can tell exactly when a girl will get her first period, but most girls start their periods between the ages of 9 and 16. There are some additional clues that signal your menstrual period is on it's way. Typically, a girl gets her period 18 months to 2 years after her breasts start to develop. Height is also another clue. Most girls have almost reached their adult height when they get their first period. They rarely grow more than 2 or 3 inches after they begin menstruating. In the months before their first periods, many girls experience a thin, white discharge from their vagina. And, also if you have pubic hair and underarm hair this is another sign it's coming soon.



One thing to keep in mind is when you get your first period it can be pretty irregular (not every month). You might not get another period 3 months from the first. You probably won't be able to accurately predict your period for a couple years.

Be patient though, most girls when they do get their period wonder what the fuss was all about. It does signal that you are becoming a woman but most women will have their period until they are in their late 40's and sometimes-early 50's. So, enjoy your time now. You'll get your period when the time is right for your body. If you're worried about how you're developing, talk with your parents. But try to relax...you'll be there soon enough!

In the meantime, never leave home without some type of feminine hygiene products, for your period in your bag or purse even if you haven't had a period yet. Until you've had your period for sometime and know when it's coming you never want to be surprised.

WHY? WHAT HAPPENS?

The whole point of having a period is so that one day you can have a child. Think about how amazing a gift that is that one day you will be able to have a mini you.

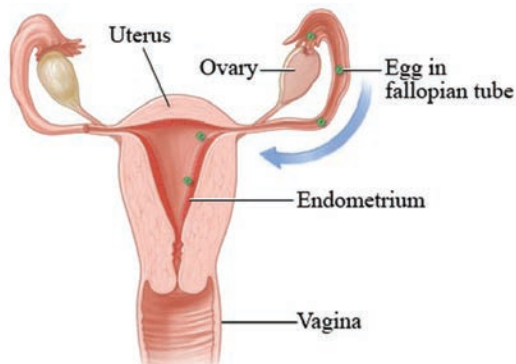


The first day of your period is the beginning of your menstrual cycle – the cycle is a series of changes in your hormone levels that occurs every month, signaling your body to send an egg to your uterus for possible fertilization and pregnancy.

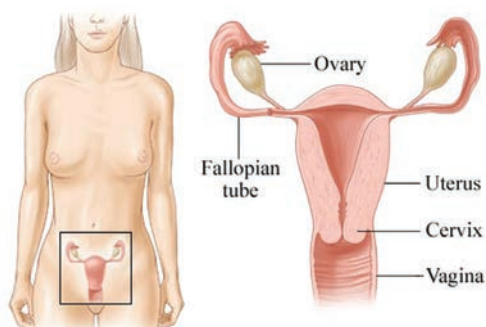
During a menstrual period, a woman has bleeding from her uterus through her vaginal canal lasting three to seven days. Each normal period occurs in a cycle that repeats about every 28 days.

Menstruation is a very complex cycle involving the interaction of your hormones, your pelvic organs and your brain.

REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS



A woman's reproductive organs include the ovaries, the Fallopian tubes, the uterus and the vagina. The ovaries contain your eggs. You were born with thousands of eggs in your ovaries – these are all the eggs you have for your lifetime. You do not make more eggs after you are born. Once you start your period hormones cause your ovaries to release one egg each month- this is called ovulation. The released egg then travels through the Fallopian tube to the uterus. The lining of the uterus, called the endometrium, has been thickened and made ready to receive the egg.



If the egg is fertilized by sperm, which comes from a man, the woman becomes pregnant and the egg will imbed itself in the endometrium. If the egg is not fertilized, however, the endometrial lining will shed away - and this shed lining is your menstrual period. So your period is made up of the endometrial lining along with some blood caused by the breaking of small blood vessels as the lining detaches itself from the inside of the uterus each month.

You may notice blood clots along with your normal menstrual blood flow. This is, in general, normal. Blood clots often occur during a heavy flow. Blood forms clots all on its own. While you are sleeping, blood may accumulate and form clots, which will come out in the morning. If you see them, it does not necessarily mean you are losing too much blood. Your blood may also be different colors - sometimes red, bright red or even brown. This is totally normal.

HOW LONG WILL MY PERIOD LAST?

The duration of your period, as well as the length of time between periods will likely vary until your body is able to regulate the hormones consistently. Some girls have their periods for only 3 or 4 days, others as long as a week. It can change month by month. Some months you may have shorter periods and some months longer.

The menstrual flow of blood can vary as well, with some girls having heavy bleeding and others only very light bleeding. You probably won't be able to accurately predict your period for a couple years. Over time, your periods will become more predictable in their timing, length,



and amount of flow. But even once your periods have become predictable, many things can cause changes and lead to irregularity such as illness, medications, exercise, stress, dieting and much more.

VAGINAL DISCHARGE

Vaginal discharge is normal under most cases. About 6 months to 1 year before a girl gets her first period, her body may start to produce vaginal discharge. This normal discharge is caused by the changing level of hormones in the body, resulting in an increase in secretions in the vagina. Normal vaginal fluids vary in texture from thin and slightly sticky to thick and gooey. They also vary in color, ranging from clear to white or off-white. Normal vaginal discharge has several purposes including cleaning and lubricating the vagina and helping to prevent infections.

If the discharge has a yellow or green color, is clumpy like cottage cheese, or has a bad odor then this may be an abnormal vaginal discharge. If any of these symptoms are present see your doctor. Things like yeast infections and bacterial vaginosis are examples of vaginal infections that can cause an abnormal vaginal discharge. Also, if you have had sex, there are other sexually transmitted infections like Chlamydia that can cause abnormal vaginal discharge.

Will it hurt?

The actual bleeding during your period does not hurt. However, many women experience some



uncomfortable symptoms during the week or so before their period starts. These symptoms are due to changes in hormone levels and are part of the syndrome of signals that may occur during the week before you start your period each month. We call it Premenstrual

Syndrome (PMS). It includes things such as breast tenderness, cramping, bloating, food cravings, irritability, mood swings, fatigue, nausea, and acne.

Cramps are one of the most common PMS symptoms.

Cramps are caused by the contraction of your uterus

during menstruation. You may feel the cramps in your abdomen, in your back, or even down your legs. Cramps can be dull and achy or sharp and intense, but they usually last only a day or two. Try taking a warm bath or place a heating pad on your abdomen if you have discomfort from cramps. Some girls feel that mild exercise helps relieve menstrual pain.

Additional ways to reduce your PMS symptoms include eating a good diet with lots of fruits and vegetables, staying away from processed foods, and drinking plenty of water. Ask your doctor for additional advice if these measures are not effective.

WHAT TO USE

Regarding what to use – pads or tampons. The simple answer is you have to try them out to see what you like best. One is not necessarily better than the other and most girls find they use different things throughout their period depending on what's happening that day.



A sanitary pad (or “pad”) is designed to fit securely in the crotch of your

underwear and absorb period flow. Wear pads on heavier period flow days and at night. A panty liner is just a lighter, thinner pad. You can wear it on

lighter days of your period, or combined with tampons to absorb any extra fluid.

Pads are made of cotton or cottony feeling material. Some have extra material on the sides called “wings” that fold over the edges of your underwear to prevent leakage. Some pads come with a deodorant or perfume to cover up odor, although doctors generally advise against using these. If you are concerned about an odor during your period, keeping yourself clean is the only real way to do that. Be cautious about products that are perfumed because they may contribute to vaginal yeast infections.

Some days you may have heavier bleeding, and other days you may have light bleeding or spotting. If using pads, you should buy pads in several different thicknesses for these different types of flow.

Change your pad every 3-4 hours (sooner if it becomes saturated) because this helps keep you clean and prevents build up of bacteria, which can develop an odor.



Tampons, like pads, are products designed to absorb menstrual flow. They come in all different sizes and absorbencies. Tampons are made of soft cotton or



rayon-cotton blend fibers pressed together to form a cylinder-like shape so that they can fit into the opening of the vagina. A tampon absorbs your menstrual flow, or blood, before it has a chance to leave the body.

Tampons are available with or without applicators - they can either be inserted into the vagina using a special cardboard or plastic tube-like applicator or with just your fingers.

Tampons are easy to use, but you do need to learn how to put them in. Follow the directions that come with the tampons carefully, and be sure to relax. It's much easier to insert a tampon when you're relaxed. Some girls find that using tampons with applicators is much easier because the applicator tube gives them something to hold onto and helps them guide it properly into the vagina.

Many girls when they first start their periods have questions such as “can the tampon get lost inside of them?” Tampons can't ever get lost inside you because there is nowhere for it to go. The cervix (located at the top of the vagina) blocks the tampon from going deeper inside you.

If there's blood on your tampon string, it usually means it's time to take it out. Never keep your tampon in longer than 4 hours, even if you are using a higher absorbency tampon. You may want to add a panty liner at the start of your period to handle any overflow or leakage. Use your pads at night. Sometimes clumps of tissue, or clots, come out along with blood during your period, which is normal. To remove the tampon, pull gently on the string that is attached to the end of it.



Whether you use pads or tampons, it's really up to you. It depends on what you're comfortable with. Both are safe and reliable if used correctly. If you play sports or swim, a tampon might be easier, won't show, and they are easy to carry in a purse or pocket. Some girls feel cleaner when wearing a tampon compared to a pad. And, some girls think pads feel bulky in their underwear. Other girls prefer pads because they are so easy to use. Ultimately, most girls switch back and forth depending on the situation and their menstrual flow. Test both to figure out what's best for you.

vaginal odor

Some girls get an unpleasant odor during or after their period, which is normal. Odor can be due to sweat or build up of moisture and bacteria on your pad. To help prevent or reduce odor, try the following:

- Keep your genital area clean and dry
- Avoid irritating soaps, and stick with products that are free of heavy perfumes
- Change tampons and pads frequently
- Wear loose cotton underwear (vs. synthetic fibers) that breathes
- After swimming, change into dry clothing and don't sit around in your wet suit.

If you still notice an unpleasant smell, talk to your mom, school nurse, or other trusted adult, or see your doctor. It may be something you need to have checked.

MENSTRUAL TOXIC SHOCK SYNDROME (TSS)

Menstrual Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) is a medical illness caused by bacteria, usually staph aureus. This bacteria is normally living in the vagina, but it can adhere to the tampon material and produce a toxin that is dangerous for our bodies. Some of the symptoms of Menstrual TSS are fever, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea,

sore throat, dizziness, and a sunburn like rash.

These days, Menstrual TSS caused by tampon use is pretty rare. Medical studies lead to many improvements and greater safety including safer tampons materials and better information about how to avoid getting TSS — such as changing tampons more frequently. Wearing a tampon for a prolonged period, longer than recommended can increase your risk of TSS. To reduce your risk of Menstrual TSS, the FDA recommends using a tampon with the lowest absorbency possible for handling your flow and changing them frequently.

GYNECOLOGIC EXAM

You should have your first gynecological exams between the ages of 13 and 15. Your doctor will tell you if your body is developing normally. He or she will also talk to you and your mom about your family health history.

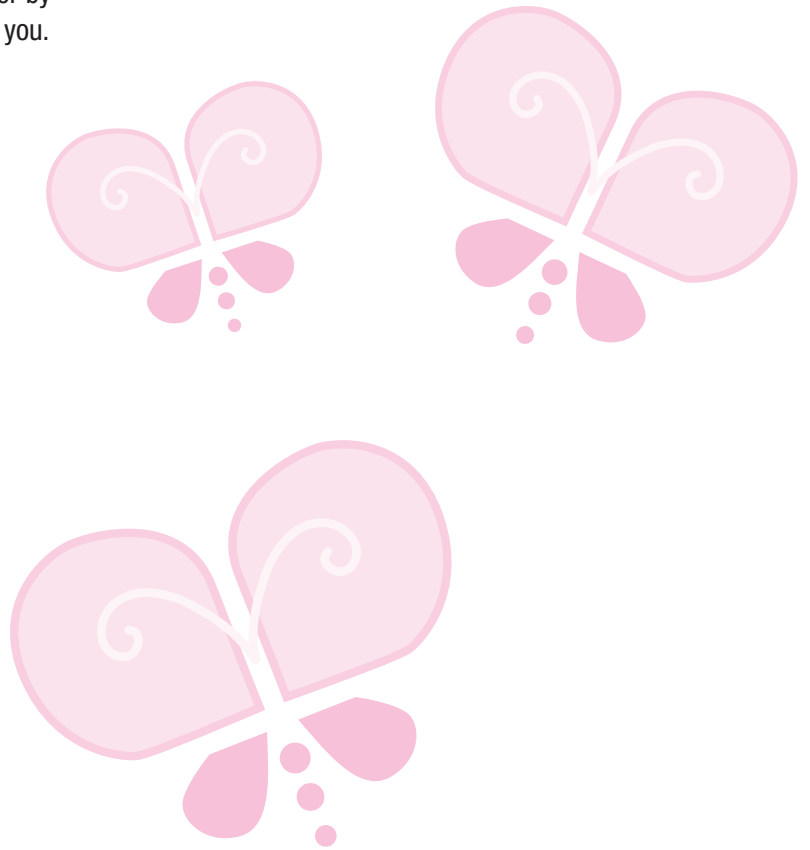


You may or may not have an internal pelvic exam during your first visit. But they will check the thyroid gland in your neck for unusual growth or lumps and listen to your heart and lungs. And, if your breasts are developing, he or she will also perform a breast exam.

First and foremost, your doctor should have a discussion time with you and answer any questions you may have about personal issues like your periods, breast discomfort, other issues that have come up.

When you are scheduled for an internal pelvic exam or pap smear, you will have a sheet or gown over

you, and the doctor will have you lie down with your feet placed in stirrups for the examination. It will feel awkward, but all women feel this way initially until they get more comfortable, and the examination is necessary to screen for many medical problems. The exam should not be painful, but you will experience some brief discomfort. The whole thing only lasts a few minutes. If you are scared about going to the doctor by yourself have your mom go in the exam room with you.



Developed by: Valerie Sabbag, Health Educator and curriculum developer.

This lesson was developed in consultation with Dr. Michelle Bourke.

Copyright © 2018 by Toyna J. Chin
All rights reserved.

Toyna chin
www.toynachin.com

