



# MY FIRST PERIOD



Why #menstrualhealthmatters





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## Foreword by Real Relief

Research has shown that girls face a number of challenges in managing their menstruation hygienically, both at home and in school. These challenges range from continued lack of knowledge, myths and beliefs about menstruation to lack of adequate water & sanitation facilities and access to affordable and hygienic sanitary materials, which often leave girls to manage their menstruation in unhygienic and ineffective ways.

**My First Period** is a beginner's manual for safe and hygienic use of menstrual products during menstruation.

**My First Period** is dedicated to all the girls around the world who are making efforts to overcome the taboos of speaking out to support better menstrual hygiene globally.

We hope that **My First Period** will contribute to breaking the silence and educating more girls about menstrual health. Menstrual health & hygiene matters to all of us and we want all girls to be proud about their menstruation and to be able to handle it with pride and dignity.





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## The first menstrual period


Girls typically start to menstruate during puberty or adolescence, typically between the ages of 9 and 19. At this time, they experience physical changes, such as breast growth, wider hips and body hair, and emotional changes due to hormones. Menstruation continues until a woman reaches menopause – usually in her late 40s to mid 50s. Then, menstruation ends.

Menstruation is also sometimes called “menses,” a “menstrual period” or just a “period.”

### What to expect in addition to menstruation


Vaginal discharge, which is different from menstruation, usually begins around the time a girl gets her first period. It can start up to six months before you have your first period. This is when the body is undergoing many hormonal changes. The type of vaginal discharge your body produces can shift during your menstrual cycle and during your lifetime. You may find it is heavier or lighter at different times.

Vaginal discharge is made up of fluids from your uterus, cervix and vagina. When your body releases an egg from your ovary, you may notice that your vaginal discharge is thicker. This change in discharge may indicate peak fertility times.



**Healthy vaginal discharge**

- Clear or whitish in color
- Has a slight odor
- Can sometimes leave a yellowish tint on your panties
- Changes in consistency throughout the menstrual cycle



**Abnormal vaginal discharge**

Talk to a doctor if your discharge:

- Appears green, gray or yellow
- Looks like cottage cheese in color and consistency
- Looks foamy or frothy
- Smells like fish, yeast or another strong odor
- Is blood-stained or brownish
- Or if you have vaginal itchiness

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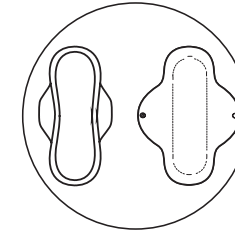




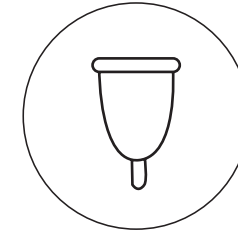


## Menstrual sanitary products

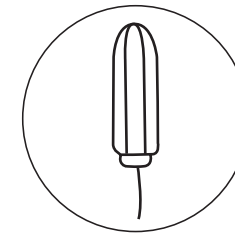
Disposable and reusable sanitary pads



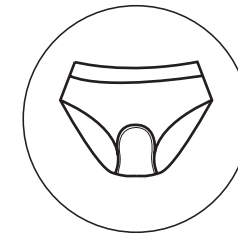
Menstrual cups



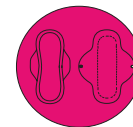
Tampons



Menstrual panties



## How to manage your period



If you use a pad, place it in your underwear. Never insert the material inside your vagina (except if it's a tampon or a cup, then you have to insert it into the vagina). Change the cloth, pad, cotton or tissue every two to six hours, or more frequently if you think the blood flow is getting heavy.

Talk about menstruation with other girls and women, like your mother, sister, aunt, grandmother, female friend or an older woman in your community.

Don't be afraid. It can be scary to see the blood on your underwear, but it is perfectly normal and natural.

If you are at school when you get your first menstrual period, tell the matron, a female teacher or a fellow student.

Feel proud! Your body is developing into that of a young woman.

### Tip!

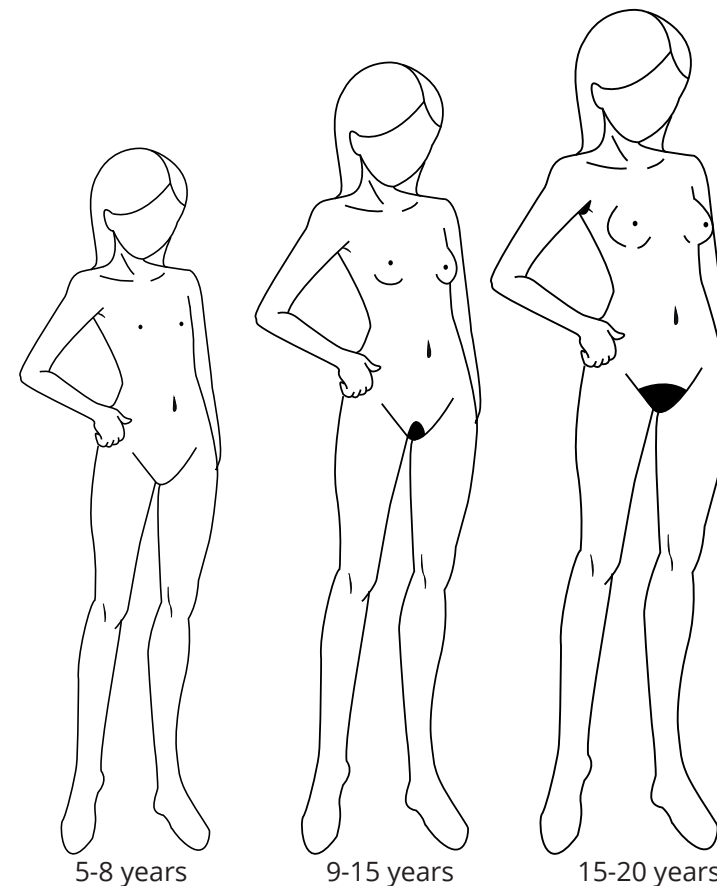
Menstrual products should ideally be stored in a clean, cool, dry place that is free from dust, smoke and chemicals, if at all possible.







## What happens to your body



### What physical, emotional and social changes occur when a girl is growing up?

#### Physical changes

- Height gain
- Weight gain
- Acne
- Growth of hair on the armpits and genitalia
- Voice becomes high pitched
- Development of the vagina and breasts
- Menstruation

#### Emotional changes

- Ambition/desire/dreams
- Shyness
- Strong opinions

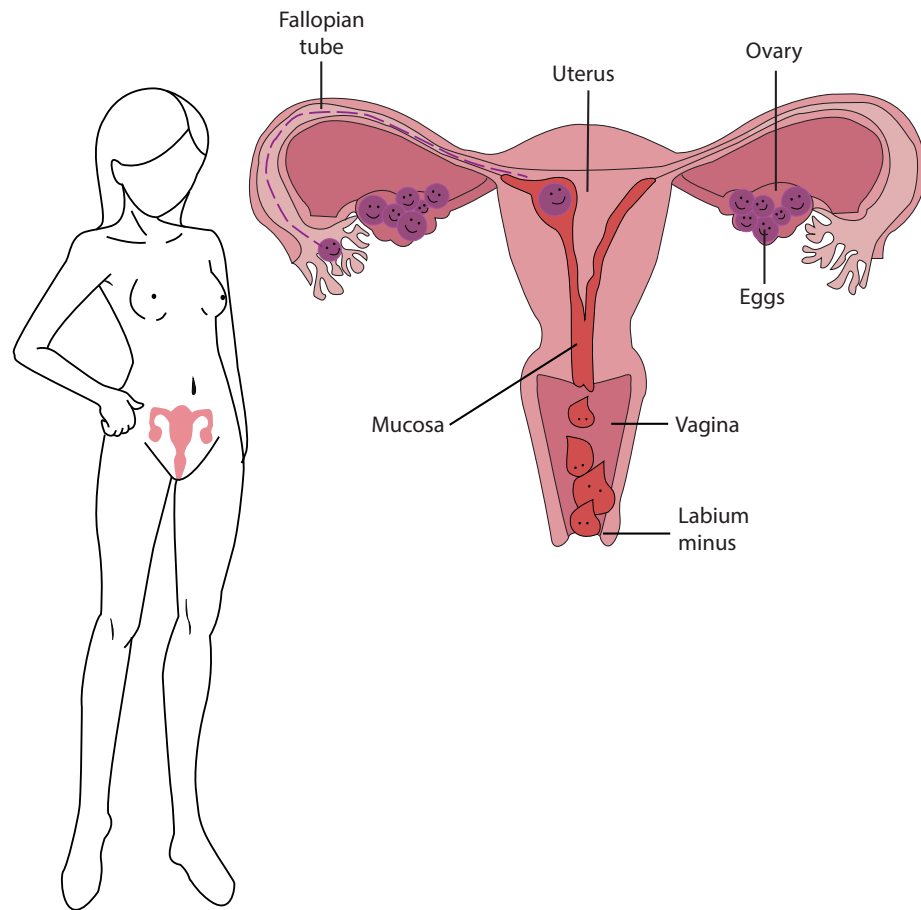
#### Social changes

- Responsibility
- Individual desire
- Seeking independence and testing boundaries

## What is menstrual blood and where does it come from?

Menstruation is the regular discharge of blood and mucosa from the uterus through the vagina.

The uterus is a hollow, pear-shaped organ that is responsible for nourishing the embryo and fetus during a pregnancy. When preparing for an egg, the uterus mucosa thickens. This helps the uterus to hold on to a fertilized egg. If the egg is not fertilized, the mucosa is released through the vagina as menstrual blood.

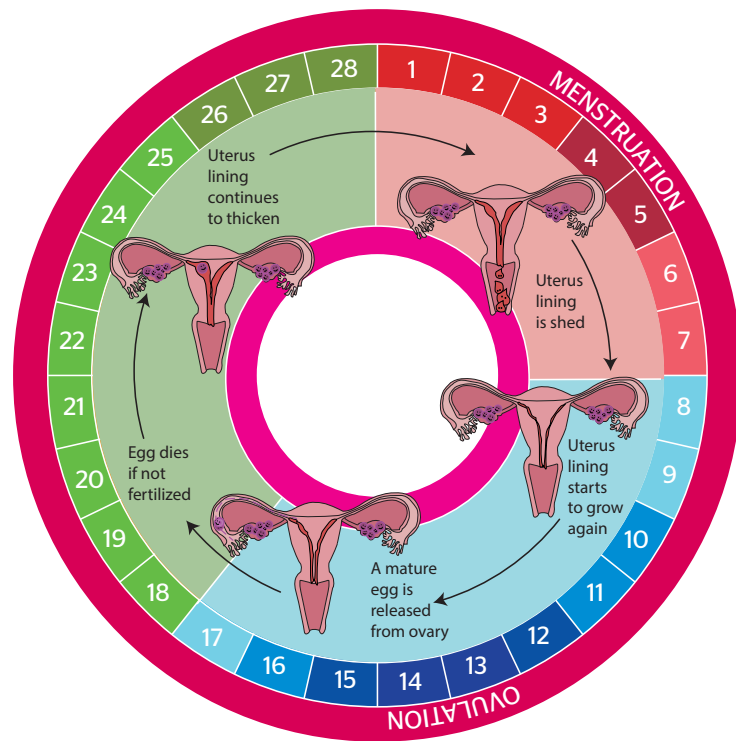


## The female reproductive system

The menstrual cycle usually lasts approximately 28 days but it can vary from 21 to 35 days. Each cycle involves the release of an egg (ovulation), which moves into the uterus through the fallopian tubes. Tissue and blood start to line the walls of the uterus for fertilization. If the egg is not fertilized, the lining of the uterus is shed through the vagina along with blood. The bleeding generally lasts between two and seven days, with some lighter flow days and some heavier flow days. The cycle is often irregular for the first year or two after menstruation begins.

### Menstrual side effects

During or before the bleeding part of the menstrual cycle, many women and girls suffer from pains such as abdominal cramps, nausea, fatigue, lightheadedness, headaches, backache and general discomfort. They can also experience emotional and psychological changes such as heightened feelings of sadness, irritability or anger due to changing hormones. This varies from person to person and can change significantly over time.

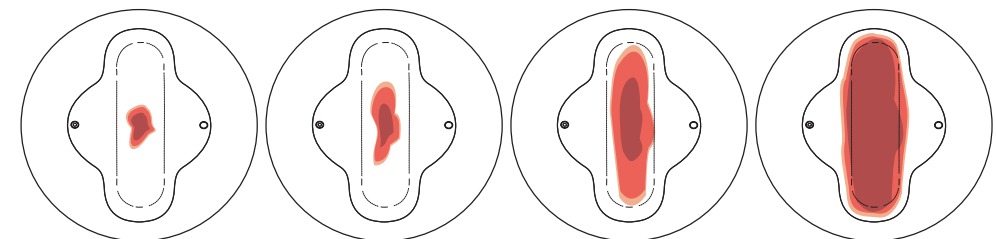


Menstruation stops after menopause, which usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age.



## Is it really blood?

Menstrual discharge is not just blood, but a mixture of uterine lining tissue and blood. The total monthly menstrual discharge varies from about 4 to 12 teaspoons, and the average woman's menstrual flow is between 30 and 40 ml. Anything over 60 ml is considered heavy menstrual bleeding. The flow will be lighter at the start of your period, then heavier for a time, then lighter again. The color will also change from brownish-red at the beginning of your period to darker red in the middle and light or brownish-red again at the end.



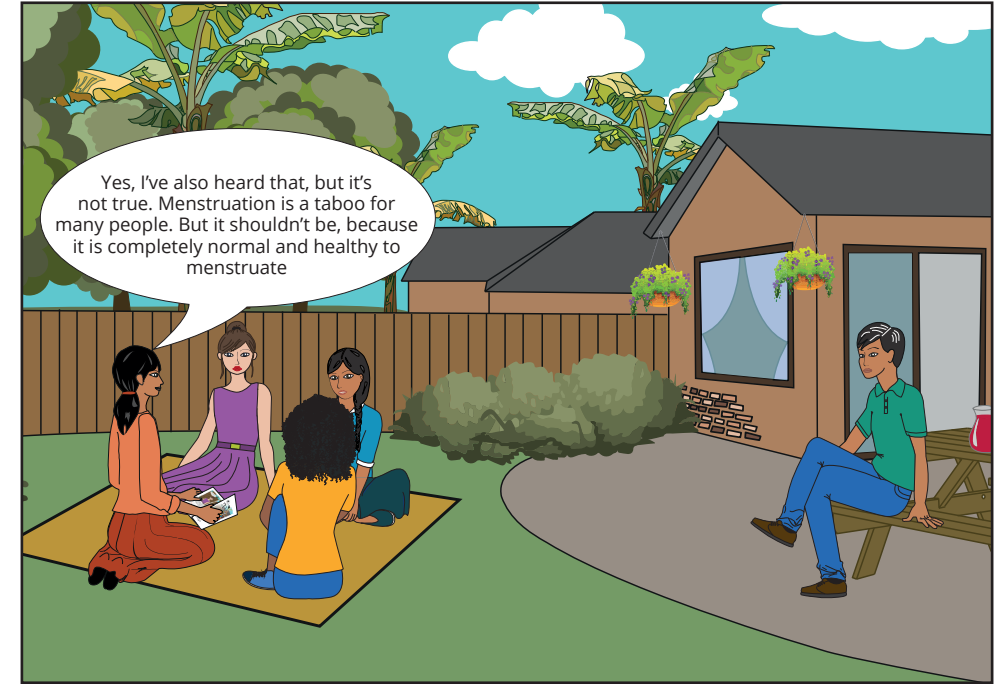
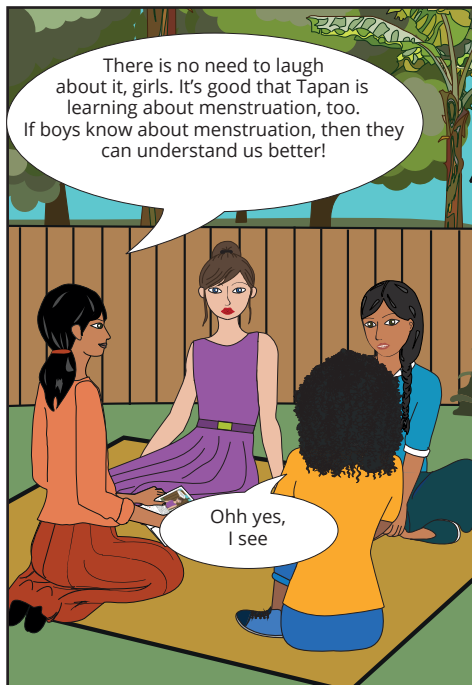
**Scant amount**  
Blood only on tissue when wiped or less than 1 inch/2,5 cm stain on a pad within one hour.

**Light amount**  
Less than 4 inches/10 cm stain on a pad within one hour.

**Moderate amount**  
Less than 6 inches/15 cm stain on a pad within one hour.

**Heavy amount**  
Saturated pad within one hour.





## What is a taboo?

A taboo is something people don't like to talk about, so they avoid conversation about the topic. One common menstruation taboo is that periods are embarrassing and that women are unclean during the time of their period. But it is not true. Periods are completely natural and should not be surrounded by shame.

### COMMON MYTHS

#### About what women can't do when they have their menstruation

A lot of women are oppressed in their daily lives by myths. Some of the most common myths - all of which are untrue - are that women cannot:



Attend religious functions



Cook



Go to school



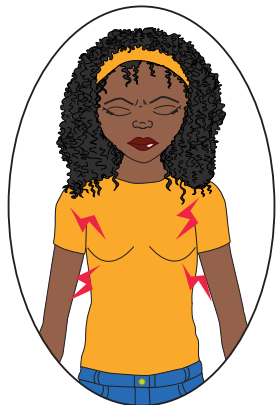
Touch males



Eat certain types of food

## Do you know what PMS is?

PMS stands for Pre-Menstrual Syndrome. Usually, a few days before menstruation, you may start feeling some soreness or heaviness in your breasts, and your stomach may feel bloated. You may get headaches, backaches, nausea and food cravings. Sometimes, because of the fluctuating hormone levels, you may feel more moody, sad or emotional than usually.



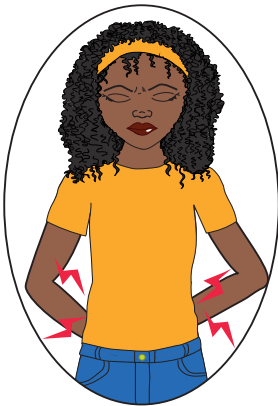
Sore breasts



Abdominal pain



Headache



Backaches



Acne



Mood changes



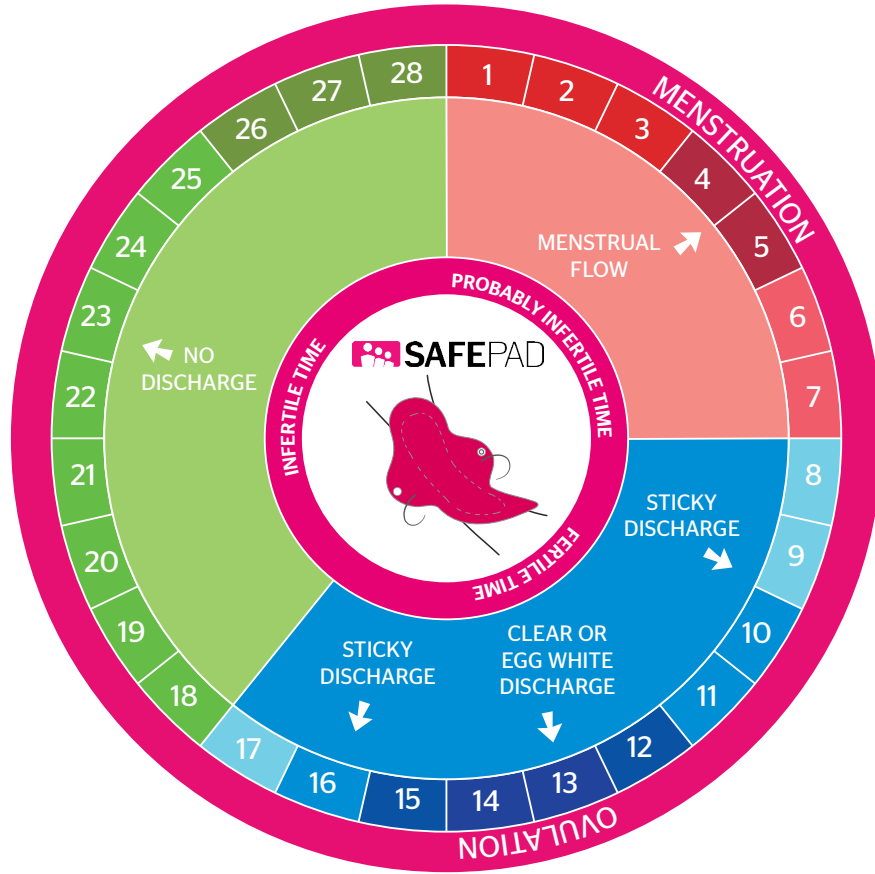
## What is a period calculator and why should you use it?

A period calculator is a small calendar or table that tells you when you get your period, depending on how long your cycle is. Using a period calculator can give you a heads up as to when your next period is due, so that you're never surprised when that time of the month rolls around. You'll know the exact time to expect it. When you track your cycle with a period calculator and know when to have a sanitary pad on hand, you can face every day with much more confidence.

IF YOUR CYCLE LENGTH IS	THE OVULATION PERIOD WILL BE ON
22 Days	Day 6-10
24 Days	Day 8-12
26 Days	Day 10-14
28 Days	Day 12-16
30 Days	Day 14-18
36 Days	Day 20-24
42 Days	Day 26-30

## How to calculate your menstrual cycle

The menstrual cycle begins on the first day of your period. In other words, day one of the cycle is day one of your period; cycle day two is the second day of your period and so on.

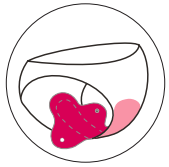


Let's say the first day of your menstrual cycle is March 4, and that you bleed for five days.

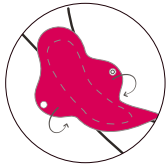
The duration of your menstrual period is five days for the month of March. If your next period starts on April 2, then your menstrual cycle length is the number of days from March 4 to April 1 (the day before your next period), which is 29 days. You should not count the first day of your next period, because that day is part of the next menstrual cycle.



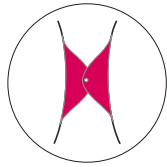
## How to use a sanitary pad



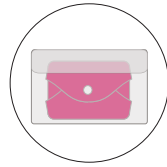
Place the Safepad™ inside your underwear



Bend the wings of the Safepad™ downward.

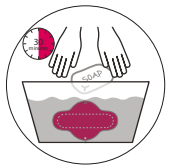


Button the wings together.

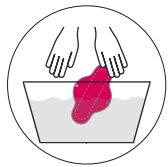


After use, fold the Safepad™ and put it into the storage bag until washing.

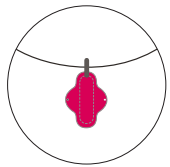
## How to wash your reusable pad



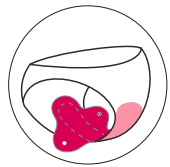
Soak the used Safepad™ in cold water for 30 min with detergent or soap. Do not use bleach.



Rinse with clean water.



Dry in a well-ventilated area.

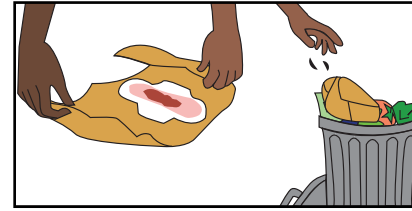


Reuse the Safepad™ after it has fully dried.



A Safepad™ should not be bleached or ironed.

## How to dispose of sanitary pads



Disposable sanitary pads should be discarded as ordinary household waste after one use.



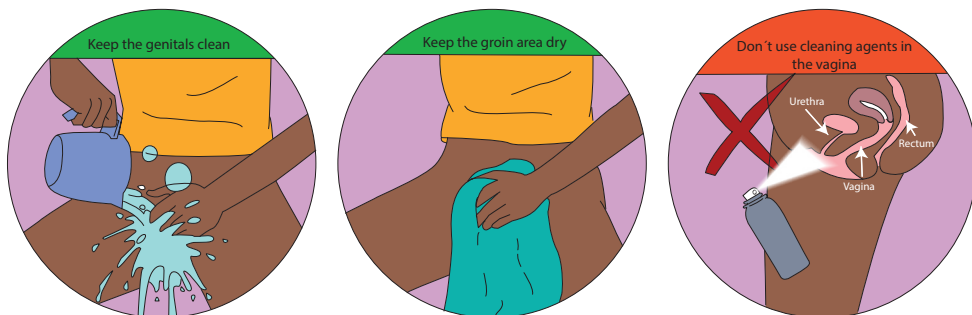
A Safepad™ can be washed and reused at least 100 times\*). When it can no longer be reused, it should then also be disposed of as ordinary household waste.

\*) When following the washing instructions.





## How to wash and stay clean during menstruation



Girls and women need to practice a high level of personal hygiene during menstruation:

### 1. Keep the genitals clean

When you menstruate, the blood tends to enter tiny spaces like the skin between your labia or crust around the opening of the vagina. You should always wash this excess blood away. This also minimizes odor from the vaginal region. It is important to wash your vagina and labia well, before you change into a new pad, if possible.

Always wash or clean the area in a motion that is from the vagina to the anus. Never wash in the opposite direction. Washing in the opposite direction can cause bacteria from the anus to lodge in the vagina and urethral opening, leading to infections. If you cannot wash yourself before you change pads, be sure to wipe off the areas using toilet paper or tissue.

### 2. Keep the groin area dry

It is important to keep your groin area dry, so that you don't get any infections or vaginal fungi.

### 3. Don't use cleaning agents in the vagina

The vagina has its own cleaning mechanism that works in a very fine balance of good and bad bacteria. Washing it with soap can kill the good bacteria, increasing the risk of infections. So, while it is important to wash yourself regularly during this time, all you need to use is some warm water. You can use soap on the external parts, but do not use it inside your vagina or vulva. And do not try to remove bad odor with deodorant.





## What can help to reduce the pain during your period?

There are many different ways to feel more comfortable. Here are some of the most popular:

### Healthy food



#### Nuts

Nuts are rich in omega-3 fatty acids and can help you feel better during your period.



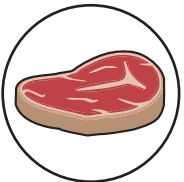
#### Fresh fruits

Get a lot of fresh fruits before your flow begins to ensure a healthy digestive system.



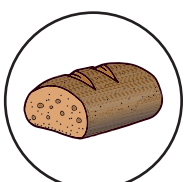
#### Leafy green vegetables

They are rich in iron and B vitamins. Their high fiber content also can help with digestive issues.



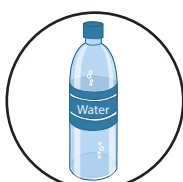
#### Red meat

It is important to increase your iron intake during your period to make up for the iron you lose while bleeding.



#### Whole grains

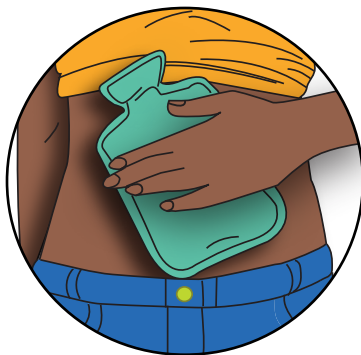
Just like with fruit, the fibers in whole grains can help you to have regular bowel movements during your period.



#### Water

It's good to drink a lot of water to cleanse your body.

### Heating pad

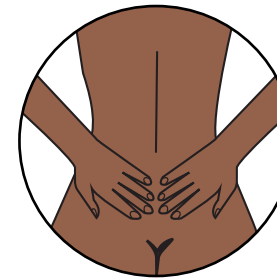


#### Remember!

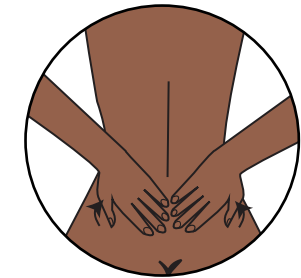
For severe cramps, ask the doctor for a prescription for pain killers.

## Pressure points

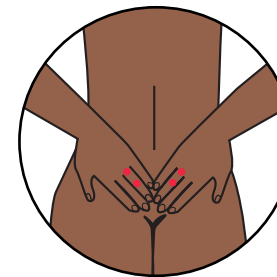
How to locate and use your pressure points



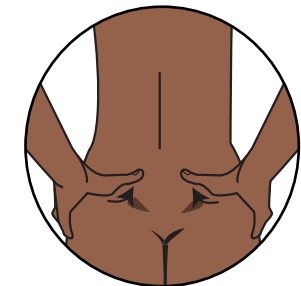
1. Place your hand palms down on your lower back, with the tips of your middle fingers just above the butt crack.



2. Move your hands into a "V" shape, so that the tips of your pinkies barely touch.



3. You'll find two pressure points where the first knuckles on your ring fingers are and two more pressure points where the second knuckles are.



4. Using your thumbs, push in and upward on those pressure points and hold. Relief should be instant, but longer term relief will take 5-10 seconds of pressure.

#### Remember!

Pressure points are nerve clusters. You'll know if you've found them if they feel a bit more tender than the rest of your back.

#### What are nerve clusters?

Nerve clusters are found throughout the body. They consist of clusters of nerves. When the nerve clusters are pressed, blood flows through the nerves and relieves the pain.



## Exercises

To relieve menstrual cramps



### Fish pose

It stretches out the muscles of the back, neck, chest and legs. This relieves muscle aches and pains that are associated with menstruation.



### Bow pose

This pose helps remove menstruation-related complaints such as backache, fatigue and anxiety. It stretches the front portion of the body.



### Camel pose

This pose relieves menstrual discomfort. It lessens backache and helps the body to relax.



### Twist pose

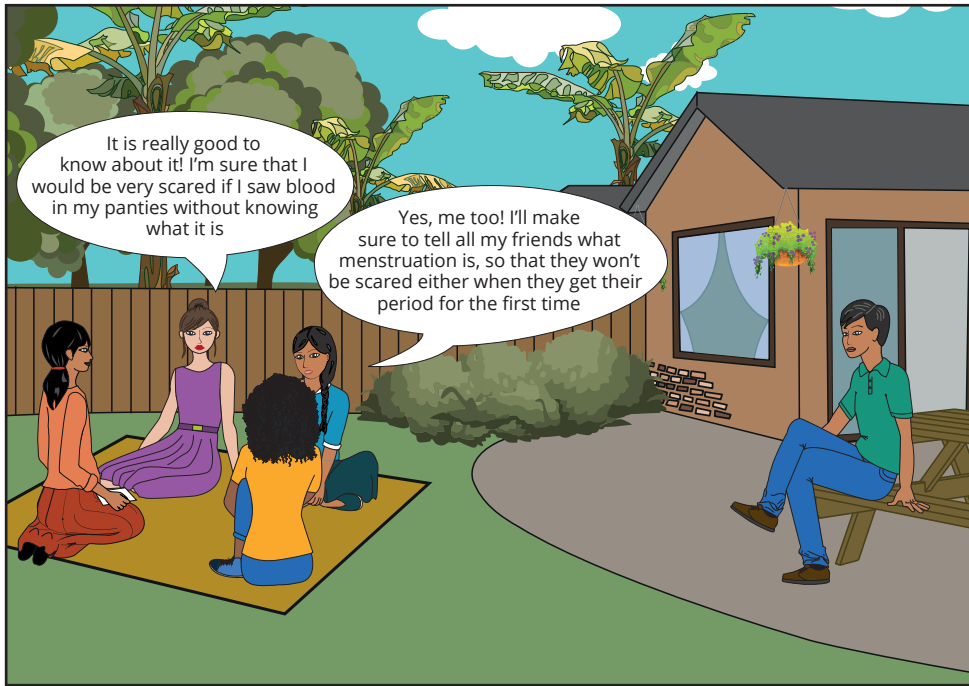
This pose helps stretch the muscles of the back, ankles and belly. It also helps to relieve lower back pain.



### Head-to-knee forward bend

This pose stretches the spine, hamstrings and shoulders. It helps providing relieve from menstrual issues like fatigue, anxiety and headache.





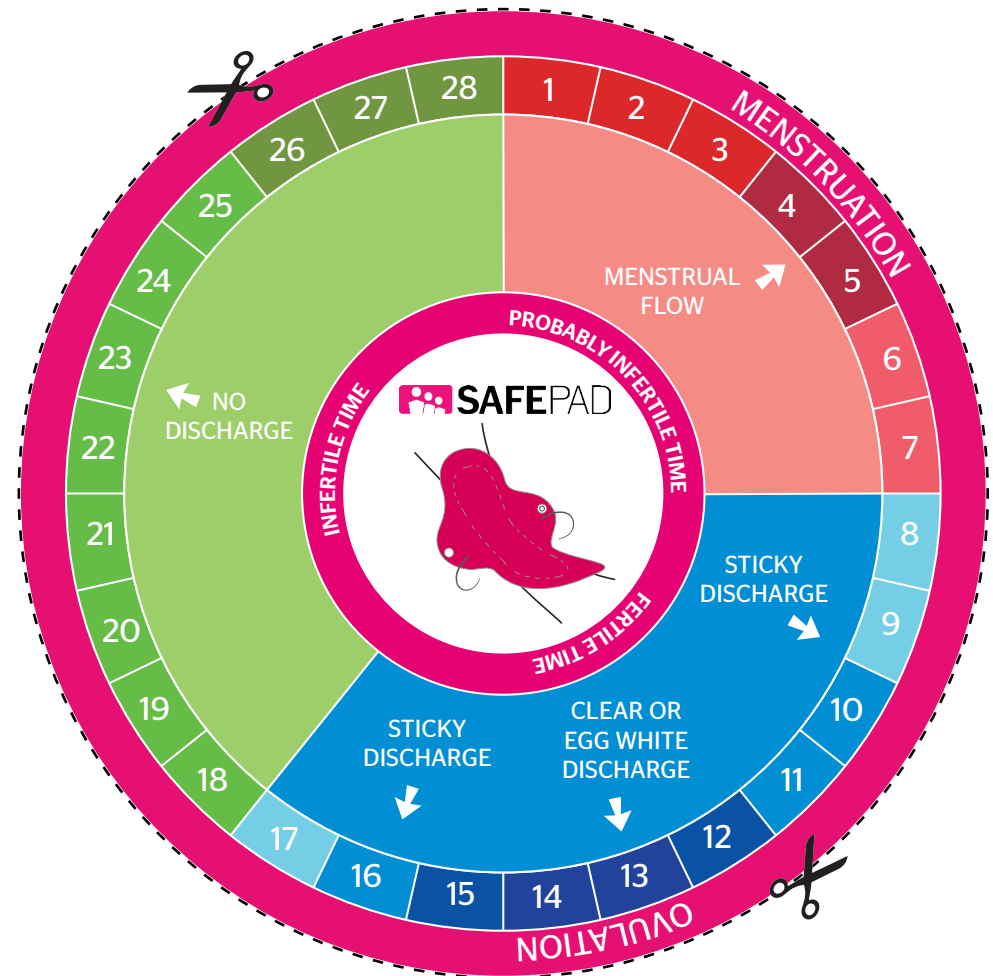
**There's nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about!**

Even though menstruation is completely healthy and natural, some people have a hard time talking about it. It's often a sensitive topic, leading to shame and embarrassment, with negative implications for women and girls. For example, male shop owners may decide not to have sanitary hygiene products or hide them from view, and girls might not be confident asking for them. Mothers may be too embarrassed to talk to their daughters because of the connection between menstruation and reproduction, and teachers may not be allowed to teach the biological facts. By treating menstruation as the normal, natural topic it is, you can help putting an end to unnecessary and unfair shame and embarrassment. Plus, you can help women and girls to be proud of themselves!

#breakthesilence

#nomoret taboo

**Cycle calculator**



## 5 important menstrual hygiene tips

### 5 important menstrual hygiene tips

1. Use clean underwear and change them regularly.
2. Change pads or tampons regularly (once every six hours).
3. Wash the genital area with plain water (no soap) after each toilet visit and even after urination, if possible. At least wipe with toilet paper or tissue.
4. Keep the area between the legs dry, otherwise you may experience chafing.
5. It is very important to remember that the vagina has its own self-cleaning mechanism, and an external cleaning agent like deodorant or soap should not be used inside it.

-FEEL SAFE, FEEL FREE-

## Menstrual period tracker

Year: \_\_\_\_\_

Jan	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Feb	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28				
Mar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Apr	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
May	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Jun	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
Jul	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Aug	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Sep	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
Oct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Nov	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
Dec	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	

Year: \_\_\_\_\_

Jan	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Feb	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28				
Mar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Apr	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
May	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Jun	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
Jul	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Aug	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Sep	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
Oct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Nov	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
Dec	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	



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