**Embracing Menstruation with Dignity and Knowledge**

- Aryan Bhandari

**Introduction**

Menstruation, commonly known as a period, is a natural biological process experienced by nearly half of the world's population. Despite its universality, it remains shrouded in myths, misconceptions, and stigma. At Yoni Bleed with Pride, our mission is to foster a more informed, respectful, and open discourse around menstruation. This draft aims to address the facts and debunk the myths surrounding menstruation, empowering individuals to embrace this natural process with pride and dignity.

**Abstract**

Menstruation is a phenomenon unique to girls. However, it has always been surrounded by taboos and myths that exclude women from many aspects of socio-cultural life. In India, the topic has been a taboo until date. Such taboos about menstruation present in many societies impact on girls’ and women's emotional state, mentality and lifestyle and most importantly, health. The challenge, of addressing the socio-cultural taboos and beliefs in menstruation, is further compounded by the low girls’ knowledge levels and understandings of puberty, menstruation, and reproductive health. Thus, there is the need to follow a strategic approach in combating these issues. The current paper aims to discuss menstruation related myths prevalent in India, their impact on women's life, relevance of addressing these issues in primary care and a brief description about various strategies to combat them.

**What is Menstruation ?**

Menstruation, or period, is normal vaginal bleeding that occurs as part of a woman's monthly cycle. Every month, your body prepares for pregnancy. If no pregnancy occurs, the uterus, or womb, sheds its lining. The menstrual blood is partly blood and partly tissue from inside the uterus. It passes out of the body through the vagina. This natural process is a sign of a healthy reproductive system. Understanding menstruation is essential for recognizing and maintaining overall reproductive health.

**Myths About Menstruation**

**Myth:** Menstruation is Dirty and Impure

**Fact:** Menstruation is a natural and clean biological process. The blood and tissue shed during a period are not impure; they are simply part of the body’s natural reproductive cycle. Cultural and religious beliefs labelling menstruation as unclean are rooted in historical misconceptions.

**Myth:** You cannot exercise while you are on your period.

**Fact:** There is no scientific evidence that exercising while you are on your period can harm your physical health. In fact, exercise is good for a sound body and mind and can even help to reduce the pain due to menstrual cramps. There are no risks to regular physical activity, like walking. Certain yoga asanas may help you feel better during your period cramps. You can discuss with a wellness expert to know what exercises can safely be done during periods. The best bet can be to avoid a high-intensity workout.

**Myth:** You shouldn’t wash your hair during your period.

**Fact:** You don’t need to compromise with your personal hygiene habits due to your periods. There is no study that states one cannot wash your hair or take a shower on your period. In fact, a warm bath can help you with the painful cramps.

**Myth** : Menstrual Pain is Always Mild

**Fact:** Menstrual pain, or dysmenorrhea, can range from mild to severe. For some, it can be debilitating, affecting daily activities and quality of life. Severe menstrual pain can be a symptom of underlying conditions like endometriosis or fibroids, and medical advice should be sought if pain is intense.

**What is the menstrual cycle?**

The menstrual cycle prepares your body for pregnancy. If you are not pregnant, your hormones send a signal to your uterus to shed its lining. This becomes your period. Once you start your period, the cycle starts again.

A menstrual cycle is measured from the first day of your period to the first day of your next period. The average length of a menstrual cycle is 28 to 29 days, but every woman’s cycle is different. For example, teenagers might have cycles that last 45 days, whereas women in their 20s to 30s might have cycles that last 21 to 38 days.

Your first period is called menarche. In Western countries, the average age for a first period is 12 to 13, but it can start as early as nine and as late as 16.

Your last period is called [**menopause**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/menopause). In Australia, the average age for women to reach menopause is 51 to 52. Some women might reach menopause as late as 60.

## Phases of the menstrual cycle

There are four main phases of the menstrual cycle.

**1. Menstruation**

Menstruation is commonly known as a period. When you menstruate, your uterus lining sheds and flows out of your vagina. Your period contains [**blood**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/conditionsandtreatments/blood-and-blood-vessels), mucus and some cells from the lining of your uterus. The average length of a period is three to seven days.

Sanitary pads, tampons, period underwear or menstrual cups can be used to absorb your period. Pads and tampons need to be changed regularly (preferably every three to four hours) and menstrual cups should be changed every eight to 12 hours.

**2. The follicular phase**

The follicular phase starts on the first day of your period and lasts for 13 to 14 days, ending in ovulation. The pituitary gland in the brain releases a hormone to stimulate the production of follicles on the surface of an ovary. Usually, only one follicle will mature into an egg. This can happen from day 10 of your cycle. During this phase, your uterus lining also thickens in preparation for pregnancy.

**3. Ovulation**

Ovulation is when a mature egg is released from an ovary and moves along a fallopian tube towards your uterus. This usually happens once each month, about two weeks before your next period. Ovulation can last from 16 to 32 hours.

It is possible to get pregnant in the five days before ovulation and on the day of ovulation, but it’s more likely in the three days leading up to and including ovulation. Once the egg is released, it will survive up to 24 hours. If sperm reaches the egg during this time, you may get pregnant.

**4. The luteal phase**

After ovulation, cells in the ovary (the corpus luteum), release progesterone and a small amount of oestrogen. This causes the lining of the uterus to thicken in preparation for pregnancy.

If a fertilised egg implants in the lining of the uterus, the corpus luteum continues to produce progesterone, which maintains the thickened lining of the uterus.

If pregnancy does not occur, the corpus luteum dies, progesterone levels drop, the uterus lining sheds and the period begins again

**Some of the more common menstrual problems include:**

* [**premenstrual syndrome (PMS)**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/premenstrual-syndrome-pms) – hormonal events before a period can trigger a range of side effects in women at risk, including fluid retention, headaches, fatigue and irritability. Treatment options include exercise and dietary changes
* [**dysmenorrhoea**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/menstruation-pain-dysmenorrhoea) – or painful periods. It is thought that the uterus is prompted by certain hormones to squeeze harder than necessary to dislodge its lining. Treatment options include pain-relieving medication and the oral contraceptive pill
* [**heavy menstrual bleeding**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/heavy-periods) (previously known as menorrhagia) – if left untreated, this can cause [**anaemia**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/anaemia). Treatment options include oral [**contraceptives**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/contraception-choices) and a [**hormonal intrauterine device (IUD)**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/contraception-intrauterine-devices-iud) to regulate the flow
* [**amenorrhoea**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/menstruation-amenorrhoea) – or absence of menstrual periods. This is considered abnormal, except during pre-[**puberty**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/puberty), [**pregnancy**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthyliving/pregnancy), [**lactation**](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/serviceprofiles/Lactation-Consultant) and **[postmenopause](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/menopause)**. Possible causes include low or high body weight and excessive exercise.

**Conclusion**

Menstruation is a vital part of a woman's reproductive health, representing the body's natural cycle of preparing for and responding to the possibility of pregnancy. Each month, the shedding of the uterine lining through menstrual bleeding signifies that the body is functioning correctly. This process, though often accompanied by various physical and emotional symptoms, is a normal and healthy aspect of life.

Understanding menstruation is crucial for several reasons. It helps individuals recognize what is normal and what might be cause for concern, facilitating early detection of potential health issues. It also fosters better communication with healthcare providers and supports informed decisions about reproductive health and wellness.

In conclusion, menstruation is more than just a monthly occurrence; it is an essential indicator of reproductive health. By educating ourselves and others about this natural process, we can promote a more open, supportive, and knowledgeable approach to women's health. Embracing and understanding menstruation empowers individuals to take charge of their well-being and destigmatizes an important aspect of human biology.

**Reference’s**

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