

Understanding the Menstrual Cycle

The details below are based on the explanations found in the linked resource. Watching the video beforehand is highly recommended.

Here is the link to the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42WlByexiXc>

What is Menstruation?

Menstruation is a woman's monthly bleeding, often called a period. When a baby girl is born, her ovaries already contain hundreds to thousands of tiny eggs, which stay inactive until she reaches puberty.

There is no set age for a girl to get her first period. Most girls get their period about two years after their breasts start to grow, usually between the ages of 10 and 15. However, every girl's body develops on its own schedule.

How Hormones Control the Menstrual Cycle

Two parts of the brain, called the **pituitary gland** and the **hypothalamus**, send signals to the **ovaries**. These signals tell the ovaries to make special hormones. These hormones start and control the menstrual cycle, which continues until about age 51. A period usually lasts between three and eight days.

Phases of the Menstrual Cycle

The menstrual cycle has different stages:

1. The First Phase (Follicular Phase):

- This phase starts on the first day of bleeding and lasts about 14 days.
- The **pituitary gland** in the brain releases a hormone called **FSH (follicle-stimulating hormone)**.
- **FSH** helps one **egg inside the ovary grow and mature**.
- The growing egg makes a hormone called **estrogen**, which helps the **lining of the uterus (called the endometrium) become thicker** and ready to support a pregnancy.

2. Ovulation:

- Around day 14, **high levels of a hormone called LH (luteinizing hormone)** cause the **egg to leave the ovary**. This is called **ovulation**.
- At this time, a small **increase in testosterone can also happen**, which might raise a person's interest in sex and having children in the future.

- The egg travels into the **fallopian tube**, where **tiny hairs** gently move it toward the **uterus**.
- If a **sperm** meets the **egg** in the **fallopian tube**, **fertilization** happens here.

3. The Last Phase (Luteal Phase):

- After ovulation, the **empty follicle in the ovary** becomes something called the **corpus luteum**. This makes a hormone called **progesterone**.
- **If fertilization happens, progesterone helps keep the lining of the uterus thick for a baby to grow.**
- **If the egg is not fertilized, the corpus luteum breaks down, and progesterone levels drop.**
- **When progesterone levels drop, the thick uterus lining is no longer needed and starts to shed. The shedding of the uterus lining causes bleeding. This is when the next period begins.**

What Is Menstrual Blood?

Menstrual blood is a mix **of blood and tissue from the lining of the uterus**. It leaves the body through the **vagina**. Periods usually **happen every 24 to 38 days**, counted from the first day of one period to the first day of the next.

What Happens During a Period?

During a period, some girls and women might feel:

- Cramps or pain in the lower belly
- Aching in the lower back
- Headaches
- Feeling tired
- Mood swings or irritability
- Wanting to eat certain foods
- Feeling bloated
- Sore breasts