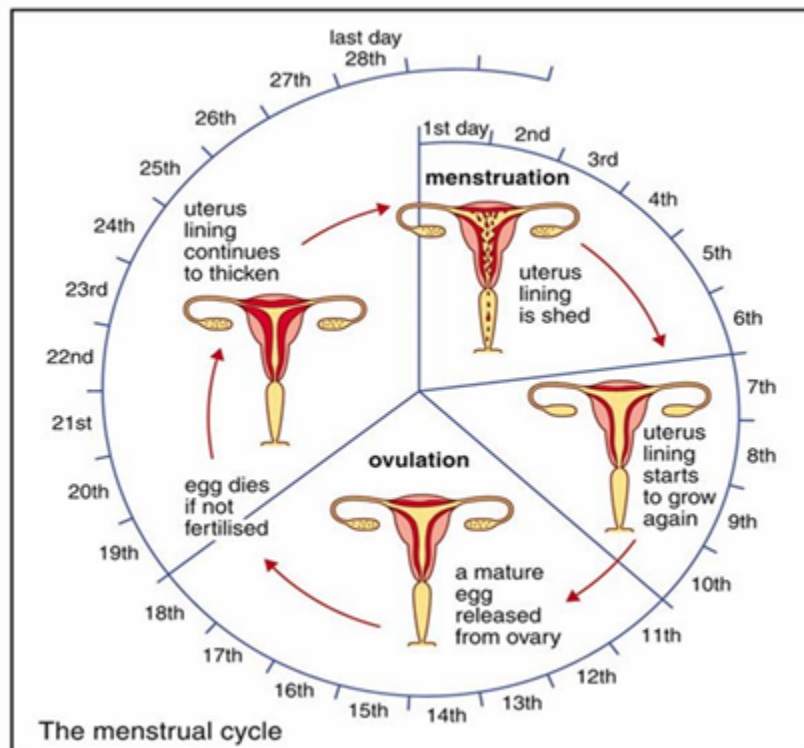


MENSTRUATION

Menstruation describes the female period. The menstruation cycle begins when a woman gets her periods. The menstrual blood which leaves her body are products shed from the uterus (the uterine lining also called the endometrium). During the remainder of the menstrual cycle the uterine lining regrows. It does so in preparation for pregnancy, which occurs if the egg (oocyte) a woman releases about half way through her menstrual cycle is fertilised. When fertilisation occurs, the lining stays in place to nourish the fertilised egg. When fertilisation does not occur the menstrual cycle continues and the uterine lining is shed marking the start of the woman's next menstrual period. Women begin menstruation at an average age of 13 (called menarche) and on average continue menstruating till age 51 (called menopause).



Menarche

Menarche (the first menstrual cycle) occurs approximately two to two-and-a-half years after the appearance of breast buds.

Even with perfect health, age of onset of puberty itself is very variable:

1. Depending on the inherited potential, each child goes through the stages of pubertal development at her own pace.
2. Late bloomers have delayed onset of puberty. This implies that the age of onset of menstruation is dependent on child's biological maturation rather than her chronological age.
3. Hormonal changes associated with puberty.

FAQ's on menarche

Q) Do Periods Happen Regularly When Menstruation Starts?

Ans- For the first few years after a girl starts her period, it may not come regularly. This is normal at first. By about 2–3 years after her first period, a girl's periods should be coming around once a month.

Q) Why have I Gained weight?

Nutrition: During pubertal growth spurt a girl gains 4-5 centimetres in height and 3-5 kilo in weight every year for 4–5 years. Corresponding bone structure and muscular mass formation accounts for almost half of that in an adult. Essential nutrition is crucial for optimal growth during teenage.

Changes in body shape often worries young girls, and some may even end up with eating disorders. Therefore, it is important to reassure teenage girls about the essential fat deposition and weight gain associated with puberty. Best is to maintain BMI percentile chart, which would clear all doubts on weight gain.

FAQ's on Menstruation

Q) How long does the period last?

Ans - It's usually a 28 days cycle, meaning if you get period on 30th of this month your next period won't come on 30th of next month but on 27th or 28th. But in some cases the cycle can be of 22 days or 35 days.

The days of bleeding ranges from 2-7 days.

Q) How Much Blood Comes Out?

Ans - Although it may look like a lot of blood, a girl usually only loses a few tablespoons of blood for the whole period. Most girls need to change their pad, tampon, or menstrual cup about 3–6 times a day.

Normal bleeding 30 - 40 ml (2-3 tablespoon)

Heavy bleeding 60 – 80 ml (4 – 6 table spoon)

If you bleed more than that you need to consult your gynaecologist.

Hygiene

- Wash Hands before and after changing the pad
- Wash the inners and dip them in hot water for few minutes. This will kill the bacteria's.
- If possible dry it under Sun.
- LET IT BREATHE!!! Since the area is always covered it is important that the area gets fresh air. If possible whenever you are alone in the room try giving it fresh air to avoid irritation and yeast infections.

Pre-menstrual syndrome

Following are the symptoms

- Headache
- Breast tenderness
- Back ache
- Bloating
- Irritation
- Moodiness

These are the symptoms that occur just before the period starts. It is called Pre- menstrual syndrome. Along with the above mentioned symptoms it may also include lack of energy and clumsiness. And these do interfere with some aspects of our life.

One way to deal with this is now that you know these are the symptoms you can relate with it that it's nothing but PMS. If you let your family members and friends know about this they too might help you in this situation as they too understand what you go through. Hormones are something that is not in our control. So you need to know that the above symptoms too are not in our control and hence need to be dealt with in a different way.

Period pain

- Abdominal or pelvic cramping
- Lower back pain
- Bloating and sore and tender breasts
- Food cravings
- Mood swings and irritability
- Headache
- Fatigue

How to cope with period pain

The first step in learning to cope the menstrual symptoms is to understand it. Once the woman understands that your headache, depression, uncontrollable fits of temper or any other symptoms are simply a manifestation of normal menstrual cycle and not a sign of any other disease somehow they become less frightening and therefore less distressing. Moreover one can take comfort from knowledge that however bad the symptoms are now, at least they will disappear in a few days when menstruation begins. Sharing the symptoms with family members will help them understand that you are in periods and hence such mood swings. This will help them deal with you easily. Besides this to manage pain you can -

- Drink lot of water
- Yoga
- Heating pad
- Hot water bath
- Rest
- Limit fat, salt, sugar, caffeine and alcohol.

Right disposal

It is always advisable to wrap the used pad in a newspaper and put a red cross on it and throw it in the dustbin. Do not flush it as it may cause choking of the drainage system.

Nutritional requirement during menstruation

The first five days of menstrual cycle is the time when blood loss occurs, therefore putting women more at risk of low iron levels. It is crucial for young girls especially vegetarians to get enough iron rich food in their diet. It is important to ensure the intake of Vit C in sufficient quantity as this enables iron to be absorbed easily in the body.

Nutrition intake during menses

- Iron Rich Foods- Red Meat, Green Leafy Vegetables, Legumes
- Vit C- Oranges, Pineapple, Lemon, Cauliflower, Strawberry
- Protein- Egg, Milk, Fish,
- Fibre- Cabbage, Spinach, Tomatoes, Guava, Banana, Soya Bean, French Beans.

Foods to avoid when in menses

- Too much salt- this can lead to bloating and water retention.
- Fatty foods- French fries, potato chips, sweets etc.
- Carbonated drinks
- Processed food

Factors affecting the menstruation

- Rigorous exercises- Frequent rigorous exercises combined with low body fat puts stress on your body and this stress tells your brain to stop producing reproductive hormones. Since you can't nourish a baby under extreme stress, your body temporarily shuts down the production of fertility hormones.
- Obesity- excess fat cells result in elevated levels of oestrogen, which can ultimately stop your ovaries from releasing an egg. Obese women usually experience heavy, infrequent, longer lasting period.
- Being underweight- Being underweight also has its adverse effect on body. Being underweight does not allow the body to build oestrogen which is required to build the uterus lining and get a period.
- Stress- too much of stress will also make your periods irregular
- Birth control pills- if one starts taking birth control pills one should give the body time to adjust with it. It may make your periods irregular for 2-3 months. But one should consult a gynaecologist if the menses are consistently irregular.

Period Complications

Facilitator asks the crowd – What problems do you face related to your menstrual cycle? They might reply with – period pain, irregular period, heavy bleeding.

Causes of period pain

- Endometriosis (uterine lining grows outside the uterus)

- Uterine abnormalities (fibroids or adenomyosis)
- IUDs
- Pelvic scarring due to sexually transmitted infections, such as chlamydia or gonorrhoea
- Heavy menstrual flow

Causes of heavy or prolonged menstrual bleeding

- Adolescence (during which cycles may not be associated with ovulation)
- Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) (bleeding irregular but heavy)
- Uterine fibroids (benign growths of uterine muscle)
- Non-hormonal IUDs
- Bleeding disorders, such as leukemia, platelet disorders, clotting factor deficiencies.
- Pregnancy complications (miscarriage)

Causes of irregular periods

- Peri - menopause (generally in the late 40s and early 50s)
- Excessive exercise
- Thyroid dysfunction (too much or too little thyroid hormone)
- Uncontrolled diabetes
- Hormonal birth control (birth control pills, injections, or implants)
- Hormone-containing intrauterine devices (IUDs)
- Medications, such as those to treat epilepsy or mental health problems.

In all the above cases it is important to go to the doctor and get yourself treated. When I say consult a doctor I mean a Gynaecologist and not the family doctor. People usually land up taking treatments from their family doctor and get no results! That's because a Gynaecologist is the right person to approach.

Product of choice

Cloth

Cloth used for absorbing menstrual flow is the product that the majority of rural girls and women prefer. Along with affordability and accessibility, environmental concerns are the reasons why women/girls prefer this product.

The user must know about the type of cloth they use, the frequency of changing, the method of washing, drying and storing cloth. Knowledge on proper use can be given if we find that some of the practices might be causing problems.

Things to be kept in mind while using cloth

- Use a freshly washed cloth (usually washed and stored cloth that is kept for a long time is the breeding house for bacteria and fungus).
- After washing, soak it in hot water so as to sterilize it before and after use.
- Dry it under Sunlight.

Cloth Pads

In recent years, some organizations have begun selling / distributing cloth pads. These cloth pads are designed to resemble sanitary napkins and yet be reusable for environmental reasons. Any reusable product should be such that it can be properly washed and sanitized. Loose cloth is sanitized by exposing it to sunlight. However, cloth pads which are usually stitched on all sides cannot be opened up and dried properly. So the inner layers may never fully be exposed to sunlight. This could result in bacterial infections due to improper drying. So unless the cloth pads can be fully opened and dried in sunlight, we do not recommend its use.

Pads

We get a variety of pads in market like super, slender, overnight, with or without wings, deodorant, maxi, mini pads

Some girls have periods with heavier bleeding, and others have lighter periods with less bleeding. Pads come in several different thicknesses and absorbances for heavier or lighter menstrual periods or for day or night time use. That way, girls who have a lighter flow don't need to feel like they're wearing a pad that's bigger than they need — and girls with a heavy flow don't need to worry that they'll leak through their pad.

Some pads are scented or come with a deodorant in them. But these can cause irritation of the vagina or an allergic reaction in some girls.

Pad disposal.

Once you've removed the pad, wrap it in a paper, put a cross mark with red ink and circle it and put it in the trash can. Don't try to flush a pad down the toilet — even the lightest kind of pad may clog up the toilet and make a huge mess.

No matter what kind of pad you choose, it's best to change pads every 4 or 6 hours, even when your flow isn't very heavy. Regular changing prevents build-up of bacteria and eliminates odour.

Tampons

Unlike a pad, which catches menstrual blood after it leaves the body, a tampon absorbs blood from inside the vagina. A tampon is also made of absorbent material, but it's compressed into a tiny tubular shape. Like pads, tampons come in different sizes and absorbencies for heavier and lighter periods

Tampons can also come with or without deodorant. There's no real need for deodorant in a tampon, since regular changing usually gets rid of any odour. The deodorant in tampons can irritate the vagina, and could cause an allergic reaction in some girls.

It's easy to use a tampon, but you do need to learn how. After washing your hands, follow the directions that come with the tampons carefully and be sure to relax. Some tampons come with an applicator — a plastic or cardboard tube that guides the tampon into the vagina. Other tampons are inserted with the fingers.

Tampons usually have a string attached to one end that stays outside a girl's body and can be used to remove the tampon at any time. Occasionally, a girl may forget to remove a tampon or may insert a new one when the old one is still in place.

If a tampon is left in too long, it won't get lost. But a girl may get a discharge and odour, and she could develop an infection. That's why it's important to change tampons often.

Menstrual cups

Like a tampon, a menstrual cup is inserted into the vagina. Instead of absorbing blood, though, the cup catches it before it flows out of the vagina. Menstrual cups are made of flexible materials, like rubber or silicone. Since you can't see when the cup is full, it will need to be emptied (or, in the case of disposable cups, thrown away) several times a day. Instructions that come with the cup explain how to do this.

Although some menstrual cups look like a diaphragm, they are not a method of contraception and will not offer any protection against pregnancy or STDs.

What to use

When deciding what type of protection to use, it's really up to you. The only precaution to be taken is to use it with proper hygiene.

Menopause

Menopause is the process through which a woman ceases to be fertile or menstruate. It is the time that marks the end of your menstrual cycles. Menopause actually occurs when the ovaries fail to release any more eggs and failed to produce hormones- oestrogen and progesterone. The average age for menopause is 51 but it can happen any time between 40's to 50's. It is a normal part of life and is not considered a disease.

Signs

- Irregular periods- some women may experience a period every 2-3 weeks. Some may not menstruate for months at a time.
- Vaginal dryness- there is dryness, itching and discomfort when a woman approaches a menopausal phase. Some may even experience pain during sex. This pain is due to lowering oestrogen. Vaginal inflammation occurs due to decreased lubrication.
- Hot flashes- A hot flash is a sudden sensation of heat in the upper body. It may start in face, neck and chest. The skin may become red and patchy and a woman will typically start to sweat. Her heart rate may suddenly increase. Hot flashes generally occur during first year after a woman's final period. Hot flashes that occur during sleep are called night sweats.
- Disturbed sleep- it can be difficult for women to fall asleep and stay asleep as they progress through menopause. In some cases night sweats can lead to discomfort during the night and difficulty in sleeping. Sleep disturbances can also be due to anxiety.
- Urinary problems- Menopause can disrupt a woman's urinary cycle. Women tend to be more susceptible to urinary tract infections during menopause such as cystitis. They may also find the need to visit the toilet more often.
- Emotional changes- Women can experience depression and low mood during menopause. Hormonal changes can often trigger depressed feelings and mood swings. In many cases, these emotional symptoms also go hand in hand with sleep disturbances.
- Loss of breast fullness

Period Stigma and taboo

In India the mere mention of the topic has been taboo even to this date. Many girls and women are subjected to restrictions in their daily simple living because they are menstruating. For example-

- 1) They cannot offer prayer while they are menstruating, cannot attend religious function, they should avoid cooking as they are considered to be impure.
- 2) Not allowed to play
- 3) Not allowed to talk to boys.
- 4) They are not allowed to touch sour foods like pickles because it is believed that while they are menstruating the body emits some specific smell, ray which turns the preserved food bad.
- 5) Do not wash hair.

Probable reasons behind the above practices

In older days, women had to perform several physical tasks such as grinding wheat, carrying heavy pots, farming, cooking food and also cleaning the house. During the menstruation, they suffered a lot of discomfort, cramps, excessive blood flow, depression, mood swings and also anger which took a toll on their health, physically and mentally. The only way to make women rest and stop them from doing their duties was by imposing a taboo on menstruation. This gave complete rest to women during menstrual days, thus helping them to recover well from menstruation.

But now times have changed, we no longer carry heavy pots as we have taps at our home, we have mixer grinders. Machines have lessened the manual efforts.

It is alright to wash hair during menses. In fact a warm bath can help relieve cramps. As for going to temple, earlier women used clothes which had higher chances of stains instead of the high absorbent sanitary napkins as of today.

Not touching pickle is related to the fact of maintaining hygiene. Any unhygienic hand touching the pickle will make it go bad. As it is, it is better to avoid eating it during menstruation as it is very oily, salty and acidic in nature. There is water retention in the body due to excess salt which might add to the period discomfort.

Common Infections of the genital area

- Urinary Tract Infections (UTI)
- Vaginitis

Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

A urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection in any part of your urinary system — your kidneys, ureters, bladder and urethra. Most infections involve the lower urinary tract — the bladder and the urethra.

Women are at greater risk of developing a UTI than are men. Infection limited to your bladder can be painful and annoying. However, serious consequences can occur if a UTI spreads to your kidneys.

Symptoms

- A strong, persistent urge to urinate
- A burning sensation when urinating
- Passing frequent, small amounts of urine
- Urine that appears cloudy
- Urine that appears red or cola-coloured - a sign of blood in the urine
- Strong-smelling urine
- Pelvic pain, in women — especially in the centre of the pelvis and around the area of the pubic bone.

Prevention

- Drink plenty of liquids, especially water. Drinking water helps dilute your urine and ensures that you'll urinate more frequently — allowing bacteria to be flushed from your urinary tract before an infection can begin.
- Wipe from front to back. Doing so after urinating and after a bowel movement helps prevent bacteria in the anal region from spreading to the vagina and urethra.
- Empty your bladder soon after intercourse. Also, drink a full glass of water to help flush bacteria.
- Avoid potentially irritating feminine products. Using deodorant sprays or other feminine products, such as douches and powders, in the genital area can irritate the urethra.
- Change your birth control method. Diaphragms, or unlubricated condoms, can all contribute to bacterial growth.

Vaginitis

Vaginitis is an inflammation of the vagina that can result in discharge, itching and pain. The cause is usually a change in the normal balance of vaginal bacteria or an infection.

The most common types of vaginitis are:

Bacterial vaginosis, which results from a change of the normal bacteria found in your vagina to overgrowth of other organisms

Yeast infections, which are usually caused by a naturally occurring fungus called *Candida albicans*

Symptoms

Vaginitis signs and symptoms can include:

- Change in colour, odour or amount of discharge from your vagina
- Vaginal itching or irritation
- Pain during intercourse
- Painful urination
- Light vaginal bleeding or spotting

If you have vaginal discharge, which many women don't, the characteristics of the discharge might indicate the type of vaginitis you have. Examples include:

Bacterial vaginosis. You might develop a grayish-white, foul-smelling discharge. The odor, often described as a fishy odor, might be more obvious after sexual intercourse.

Yeast infection. The main symptom is itching, but you might have a white, thick discharge that resembles cottage cheese.

Prevention

- Do not douche. Douching removes some of the normal bacteria in the vagina that protects you from infection.
- Do not use scented feminine products, including bubble bath, sprays, pads, and tampons.
- Change tampons, pads, and panty liners often.
- Do not wear tight underwear, chudidaars, pants, or jeans. These can increase body heat and moisture in your genital area.
- Wear cotton under-wears. Cotton underwear helps keep you dry and doesn't hold in warmth and moisture.
- Change out of wet clothes and workout clothes as soon as you can.
- After using the bathroom, always wipe from front to back.
- Avoid hot tubs and very hot baths.
- If you have diabetes, be sure your blood sugar is under control.