



Yarning about periods (menstrual cycle)

What is the menstrual cycle?

- The menstrual cycle, period or 'monthly' happens each month to prepare a woman's body for a baby. The cycle is controlled by hormones or chemical messengers that control many body functions.
- If a woman does not become pregnant during the cycle, she will have a period.
- The menstrual cycle lasts from the first day of one period to the first day of the next period.

What is menstruation?

- Menstruation is a woman's monthly bleeding often called a period or monthly
- The blood is actually the lining of the uterus (the womb or bag that holds the baby during pregnancy). The blood flows out of the opening (called the cervix) of the uterus, and then out of the body through the vagina.

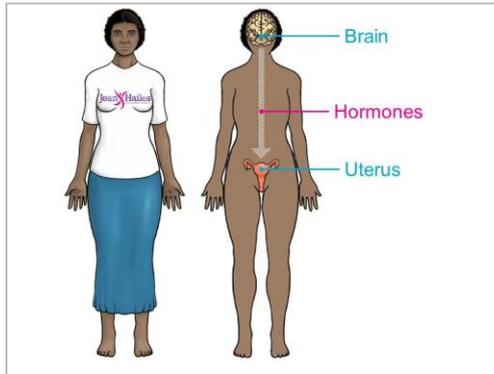
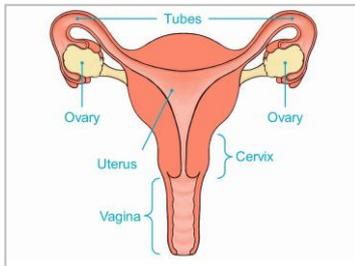
When do periods start and finish?

- The menstrual cycle usually starts when girls are about 12-13 years old, but can happen anywhere from nine to sixteen years.
- When you first start your period it is not very regular and it takes a while for the body to develop a cycle of releasing an egg and shedding the lining of the uterus every month.
- Your menstrual cycle ends when you reach *menopause*. This is usually when you are about 51 years but it may happen from 45-55 years.
- When a woman gets close to menopause the periods are often irregular until they finally stop altogether.

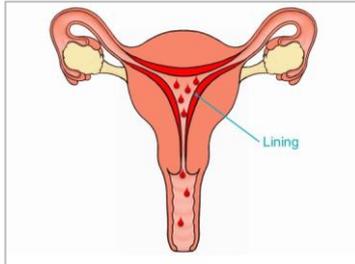
How long is the menstrual cycle?

The menstrual cycle starts on the first day of one period and finishes on the first day of the next period. After the first few years of having periods, the cycle gets more regular and is usually about 21-38 days long.

How does the menstrual cycle happen?

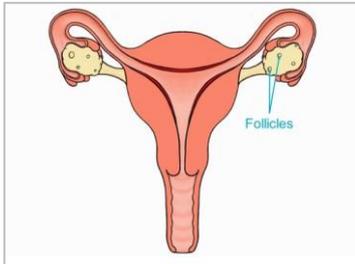


Day 1 – 6



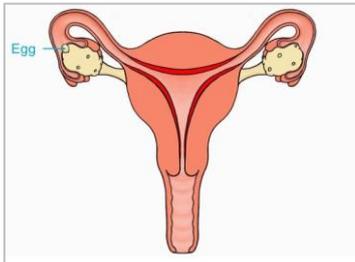
- Day 1 is the first day of the menstrual cycle and if you are not pregnant, your period begins.
- Hormones from the brain cause the ovary to produce little sacs of fluid (follicles) containing immature eggs.

Day 7 – 14



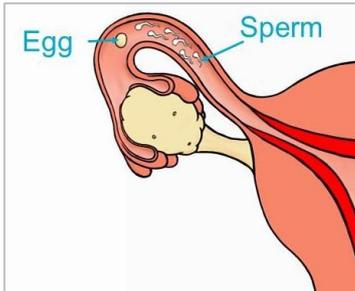
- Bleeding has normally stopped by now.
- One follicle grows to produce an egg.
- The lining of the uterus gets thicker in case a fertilised egg is implanted there.

Day 14



- Hormones cause the fully grown egg to burst out of the follicle and leave the ovary. This is called *ovulation*.

Day 15 – 20



- The egg travels down the tube towards the uterus.
- This when pregnancy can happen
- If you have had sex recently and the egg meets one of many sperm produced by a man, the egg may be fertilised.
- Once an egg is fertilised it moves down the tube and attaches to the wall of the uterus where it will grow into a baby.

Day 21 – 28



- If the egg is fertilised you will not get your period and different pregnancy hormones will be released by the body.
- If the egg is **not** fertilised the hormone levels will start to go down.
- Then the lining of the uterus starts to break down and separate from the wall.
- This causes the period to begin again.

What can girls and women expect during a period?

- The bleeding of a period can vary from very light to very heavy,
- The blood can be black, brown to bright red.
- It is normal for the bleeding to have some small blood clots.
- The period usually lasts from four to eight days.
- The flow of blood is usually heavier for the first few days and then lighter at the end of the period
- Lots of women will have some cramps and pain at the start of the period. Others may have more pain that needs medication.
- Some women have spotting and/or pain, when they ovulate (release of an egg). This is usually about two weeks before the next period.

How do you know when your period is coming?

Some women get symptoms one to two weeks before their period. They might feel or have:

- grumpy or bad tempered
- bloated
- sore breasts
- pimples
- tired

Usually you will start to feel better once your period starts or after a few days.

If you have symptoms that are interfering with your life or stopping you doing things, you should see a doctor or women's health nurse.

What to use during a period

There are different things to use during a period to absorb the blood.

Pads: these are made of absorbent material and come in different thicknesses and shapes. Pads need to be changed every 3-4 hours. Most pads are disposable but you can also get pads that can be washed and reused.

Tampons: are absorbent 'plugs' made of cotton, that come in different sizes. You can use them at any age. You need to wash your hands before you insert a tampon into the vagina.

Tampons need to be changed every three to four hours: it is important not to leave a tampon in for too long (never more than 8 hours). If bacteria develops in the vagina when a tampon is left in too long a woman can get very sick with symptoms like feeling unwell, fever, rash, diarrhoea and headache.

Is it ok to have sex during a period?

There is no reason why you can't have sex during their period. Some women prefer not to because of personal or cultural reasons. You still need to practice safe sex at this time so you don't get an STI.

Can you get pregnant during a period?

- Yes you can get pregnant during a period. An egg is usually released about day 7-10 of the menstrual cycle (about 2 weeks before a period) but you can still be fertile right up until the day the period begins. You can also get pregnant early in your cycle while you have your period.
- Sperm can stay alive inside your tubes for up to a week. So if you don't want to become pregnant, it is important to use contraception every time you have sex.

When to see a doctor about your period?

- Every woman has different periods, some are very heavy periods others have very light periods and both are normal.
- Sometimes bleeding is not normal and might be too heavy and cause you to feel very tired or dizzy.
- Sometimes heavy bleeding can cause the iron levels in the blood to get too low and make you unwell

It is important to see a doctor about your menstrual cycle if you:

- are changing a pad or tampon every hour
- are changing a pad overnight
- have clots bigger than a 50 cent piece in size
- are bleeding for more than seven days
- are bleeding for more days than usual
- are bleeding excessively
- are bleeding between periods
- are having period pain that interferes with daily life

You should also see a doctor if you:

- are not having periods by the age of 16
- normally have regular periods but then don't have a period for more than 3 months and are not pregnant.

This might be normal if you are 40+ years and heading towards menopause or if you are using Implanon, Depo-provera or the Mirena IUCD.

FEATURED ARTWORK

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