

Let's talk – Periods

It's very important that caregivers take the time to talk to the children about periods. Both boys and girls need to understand periods. Accurate information is important for everyone to dispel any myths or misconceptions, to help avoid shame and embarrassment around periods and be empathetic to those who do get periods.

All young people need to understand what a period is, why people have them, how often they will happen, what they might feel like and how to manage them. They also need to know they have a trusted adult they can talk to if they have any questions.

The most important thing is to discuss periods in a calm and natural way. If caregivers can approach periods in a practical and calm way then that feeling will be passed on to the young people and they will feel confident to ask questions.

A period is a normal and natural part of puberty and growing up. Once a period begins, the ovaries start releasing eggs and this means a person may be able to have children, when they are older, if they want to.

Period facts:

- periods can last from 3 to 7 days
- periods may be irregular to start with and it may take up to 12 months for some sort of pattern to develop
- keep track of periods using a calendar, diary or app
- the colour of the blood may vary from dark brown, dark red or bright red. Sometimes the fluid is very thick and other times runny
- periods don't last forever — they will stop when a person is around 50 years old (a change called menopause)

Common questions:

What is a period?

The correct name for a period is menstruation. Each month an egg leaves the ovary and a lining builds up in the uterus to help a baby grow if there is a pregnancy. When the body registers there is no pregnancy the lining comes away in the form of blood and leaves the body through the vagina.

What age do people get their period?

A period can start any time between 8 and 16.

How often will a period come?

A period usually comes once every 28–32 days (although it may be irregular to start with).

How long will a period last for?

A period can last from 3–7 days and will vary for each woman. Some days the bleeding is heavier than others. Periods continue until about the age of 50 when the periods stop – this is called menopause.

What are the signs that a person might get their period?

Some indications that person might get a period include breast development, appearance of pubic and underarm hair as well as more vaginal discharge. These changes might mean that a person could get their period within 6–12 months.

How much blood will come out?

There is no set amount and the blood doesn't come out at once. People may lose between 40–60ml (6–8 teaspoons) during the 3–5 days of a period. But it will be different for everyone.

What will my first period look like?

Everyone's first period will be different. A person might notice some blood on their underwear, or in the toilet bowl or on toilet paper when she goes to the toilet. A first period might be a little bit of blood or a lot. The lining that is shed can be dark red, bright red or brown.

What will a period feel like?

Sometimes people can feel their period. It can be a bit like when people notice when they have a runny nose, but you only notice it once in a while – not the whole time. The menstrual blood doesn't come out at once – think of it like an ice block melting.

I've heard of Pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS).

What is it?

Most people born with a uterus will experience some form of PMS. PMS can include some, all or none of the following: irritability, feeling flat, mood changes, tiredness, cramping of the lower abdomen, headaches, tender breasts, bloating and pimples. It's important to talk to a trusted adult about how to manage any of these symptoms. If any of the symptoms are so bad they stop a person doing things they enjoy then they should talk to a trusted adult and speak to a doctor.

Will anyone know if I have my period?

No one can tell if someone has their period.

What if I get blood on my clothes?

If you get blood on your underwear or clothes, don't panic. Tie a jumper around your waist and change your clothes. If you are at school talk to a trusted teacher or school nurse. You might feel a bit embarrassed but remember it could happen to anyone. Tip: always rinse blood stains in cold water.

Preparing a period kit

It's a good idea to organise a period kit that a young person can keep in their school bag, just in case.

It can include:

- make-up bag or pencil case
- spare underwear
- a couple of pads
- a snap lock bag (for stained underwear)
- hand sanitiser

Products to manage a period:

Pads: Pads can be disposable or reusable. Pads should be changed every 3–4 hours. Thicker pads can be worn overnight and do not need to be changed during the night. Pads should never be flushed down a toilet – they need to be placed in a sanitary bin or rubbish bin.

Tampons: Tampons sit inside the vagina and absorb the blood. There are helpful instructions on how to insert a tampon with all products. Tampons are a good choice if a person wants to swim when they have their period. They should be changed every 3–4 hours and not worn over night. Never flush tampons down toilet instead use a bin or sanitary bin. Not all women use tampons – it's a personal choice.

Menstrual cups: this is something that sits inside the vagina and can be worn without emptying for up to 10 hours.

Period pants: Underwear that has a moisture absorbing layer in the gusset, and are washable. Some brands also sell period bathers which can people can use when swimming during their period.