

MENSTRUAL HEALTH TOOLKIT
BY SISTAH SISTAH FOUNDATION

FIRST PERIOD!



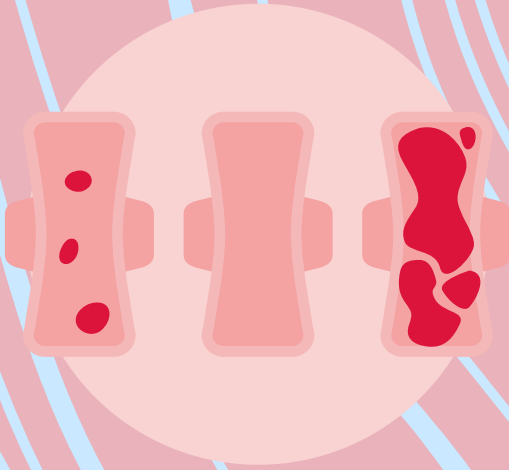


DEAR FRIEND

Welcome to a new chapter in your life! As you embark on your reproductive journey, we understand that navigating your first period can feel like embarking on an exciting yet sometimes scary and confusing adventure. That's why we are here for you and have created this menstrual hygiene toolkit just for you.

Inside, you'll find everything you need to understand the changes happening to your body, discover the wide array of menstrual products available to you, and debunk any myths that might be swirling around. We are here to provide you with tips, tricks, and friendly advice to make your period experience as comfortable and stress-free as possible.

So, let's dive in together and embrace this natural process with confidence and ease. You've got this!



Your first period!

Your first period is when you see blood coming from your vagina for the first time. It usually happens during puberty, as your body is changing. It's a big moment for others and some, it's just a meh moment that usually brings a mix of emotions. Some feel excited, while others might feel a bit nervous and others don't feel anything. It's worth noting that periods usually start between the ages of 12 and 16 but it can vary from person to person. Some may start as early as 9 or 10, while others might not begin until later in their teens. Each body has its own timeline, so don't worry if your experience is different from others.

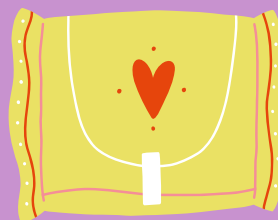
Your period might catch you off guard, at first you might see a few drops of blood in your underwear or notice a sudden stain on your clothes but don't worry, it's just your body's way of saying, "Hey, everything's working as it should!"

Your period is bleeding you will experience almost every month of your life until you are between the ages of 45 and 55, in a phase called menopause. The bleeding will last 3-7 days, but it differs for different people. Your period length might even differ according to age, temperature, diet, or health state. However, you will typically know how long your periods last within the first six months of experiencing them.

Even though periods might seem random at first, you will start to notice patterns over time. You might feel some cramps or mood swings and other symptoms called PMS (Pre menstrual symptoms)

Remember, you are not alone in this. Lots of people around the world go through the same thing. And as you get used to it, you will learn how to predict when your period will come each month.

So take a deep breath, don't stress and know that you are totally capable of handling whatever comes your way. You've got this!



Period Stories



My periods started in the ninth grade, two months after my 14th birthday. All my friends had started theirs, and I was one of the last two to begin. I felt there was something seriously wrong with me. They all had stories to share about cramps and what products to buy, and I could barely contribute.

I felt like the universe hated me! Even my cousins had started before me, and I wanted to cry because it felt like mine would never come. My mother told me that in our family, women start late; she started just before she turned 17. So, I had three years to go, and I wanted the universe to swallow me. I wanted my periods then and there! After two months of crying, they finally appeared, two days before my grade nine exams. Everyone seemed to pity me, but I was on top of the world. I too could complain about cramps and the products I hated.

It took my second period to realize why I was the only ecstatic one. What do you mean I had to have periods every month and that they lasted for four days. That they were not supposed to skip but come every month? How was that fair?



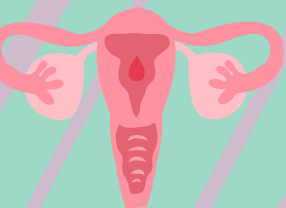
Science Behind Periods:

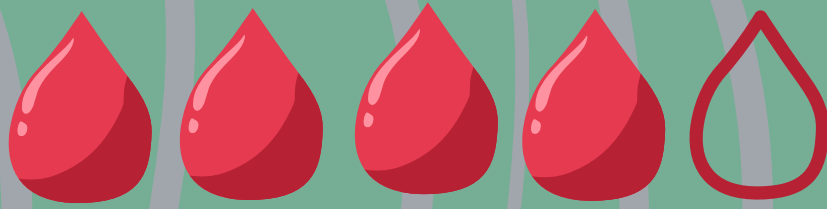
Ever wondered what's going on with your body during that time of the month? Let's take a peek behind the curtain and uncover the science behind your period.

First things first, your period is part of a reproductive process called the menstrual cycle. Think of it like a monthly adventure your body goes on, led by a team of hormones and changes that get everything ready for possible pregnancy.

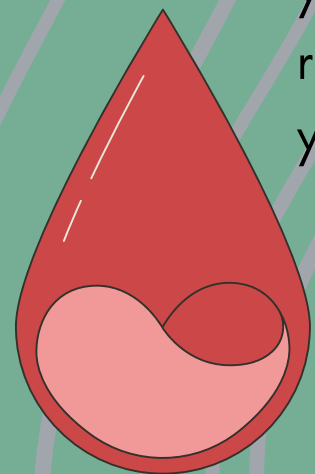
Here's the lay down on what happens:

- **Your Period Begins:** It all starts with your period. This is when your uterus sheds its lining, along with some blood and tissue, through your vagina. It's like your body's way of hitting the reset button and getting ready for a new cycle. Your period typically lasts around 3 to 7 days.





- **Hormones Take the Stage:** Behind the scenes, your body is actively producing hormones like estrogen and progesterone. These hormones work together to orchestrate your menstrual cycle, causing changes in your body throughout the month.
- **Ovulation:** Around the middle of your cycle, usually around day 14 if you have a 28-day cycle, one of your ovaries releases an egg. This is called ovulation, and it's like your body's way of saying, "Hey, I'm ready for a potential pregnancy!"
- **Preparation for Pregnancy:** After ovulation, your body gears up for the possibility of pregnancy. If the egg isn't fertilized by sperm, your hormone levels drop, and your uterus gets ready to shed its lining again for the start of your next period.



Period Stories!



Worst Period Mess Up

Everyone has that one period story that makes them want the ground to swallow them up, even years after said incident. Mine was 2 years after my first ever period. I was 15 and had just made peace with my first mess-up incident (I got up in class to walk to the front while our male teacher was teaching and had stained my uniform so bad the whole class burst out into laughter), but nothing could have prepared me for this one.

There I was, walking quickly to my class, knowing I was late and trying to avoid punishment. As I approached a group of prefects with the senior teacher (male), I started making up a story for why I was late, but instead, I thought it would be better to run past them. And just as I thought it had worked, one of those horrible prefects stopped me and asked me what I had just dropped. And there it was - my Stayfree pad with 'no wings' staring back at me (because winged pads were not a thing then). I wanted to faint and stay that way for days, but I decided on the next best thing: deny, deny, deny until they started doubting what they had seen with their own eyes. I would have gotten away with some dignity had that girl not suggested she takes me to the bathroom to check.

Note: Messing up is normal, and it happens to all of us. It can be very frustrating and upsetting, and it's okay to feel upset about it.

Health Benefits!

- **Reproductive Health Check:** Regular periods show that your reproductive system is working like a well-oiled machine. Changes in your cycle or symptoms can sometimes signal that something needs attention, so it's like your body's way of giving you a heads-up.
- **Cleaning House:** Your period isn't just about bleeding but it's also about cleansing your uterus. By shedding old blood and tissue, your body keeps things fresh and reduces the risk of infections.
- **Hormonal Harmony:** Hormones like estrogen and progesterone don't just control your menstrual cycle they also play roles in other important bodily functions, like mood, bone health, and metabolism.



- **Cancer Prevention:** Believe it or not, your period can lower your risk of certain cancers, like endometrial cancer. By keeping your uterus clean, menstruation helps prevent the buildup of abnormal cells that could lead to cancer.
- **Heart Health:** Some studies suggest that women with regular periods may have healthier hearts. Estrogen, one of the main hormones in your cycle, might have protective effects on your heart and blood vessels.
- **Strong Bones:** Estrogen also plays a key role in keeping your bones strong. Regular periods help maintain healthy estrogen levels, which can reduce the risk of bone problems like osteoporosis later in life.



Menstrual Products!

So you just started your period, and have no idea of which products to use or how to dispose of them or clean them. Here is a list of products available.

- **Menstrual Pads:** These are like the OG of period products. They're easy to use, just stick them onto your underwear, and you're good to go. Most young people start with pads because they're familiar and comfortable. Plus, they come in all shapes, sizes, and absorbencies to match your flow. When you're done with a pad, simply roll it up and wrap it in the wrapper or a piece of toilet paper before disposing of it in the trash. Never flush pads down the toilet, as they can cause blockages!
- **Menstrual Tampons:** Tampons are like pads' cool cousin. They're inserted into the vagina to absorb menstrual blood and are great for staying active during your period. Some people find them more discreet and convenient than pads, especially when swimming or playing sports. When changing your tampon, simply remove it by gently pulling the string and dispose of it in the trash. Never flush tampons down the toilet, as they can also cause blockages!

- Menstrual Cups: Ah, the menstrual cup an eco-friendly alternative that's gaining popularity. These little silicone cups collect menstrual blood inside the vagina and can be worn for up to 12 hours. When it's time to empty your cup, remove it and empty the contents into the toilet. Rinse the cup with water and mild soap before reinserting it. At the end of your cycle, give your cup a thorough wash with soap and water before storing it for next time.
- Period Panties: Period panties are like your regular undies, but with superpowers. They have built-in absorbent layers that keep you feeling dry and comfortable all day long. After wearing period panties, rinse them under cold water to remove any excess blood, then wash them with your regular laundry. Avoid using fabric softener, as it can affect their absorbency.
- Diapers: Diapers provide maximum absorbency and coverage, ensuring comfort and leak protection throughout the day or night. When you're done wearing a diaper, simply remove it and roll it up tightly, securing it with the tabs. Dispose of it in the trash.

Remember, finding the right menstrual product is all about trial and error. What works for your bestie might not work for you, and that's okay! Whether you stick with pads, venture into tampons, give menstrual cups a try, or opt for diapers, the most important thing is to use what feels comfortable and empowering for you. Your period journey is unique, so embrace it and find what makes you feel confident and comfortable!



Period Stories



My classmates and I had spoken about periods and what would happen once you got them. Some had already had their periods, so they were the wise ones in the group, leading us, the clueless ones. I remember how I did not want my period to start because I couldn't imagine being in class while I was bleeding.

One fateful day, my period appeared, and I rushed to tell my mom so she could show me how to wear a pad because my friend had poorly instructed that they go between your legs. My mom's opening line was that I was now capable of falling pregnant and that I should stop playing with boys. Jokes on her because I was at a Muslim school in an all-girls class, so where were the boys supposed to come from?

The next day, I felt embarrassed going to school because I thought everyone could tell I was on my period. Thankfully, I was wrong, and I managed through that day and the next and the next periods in the coming months.

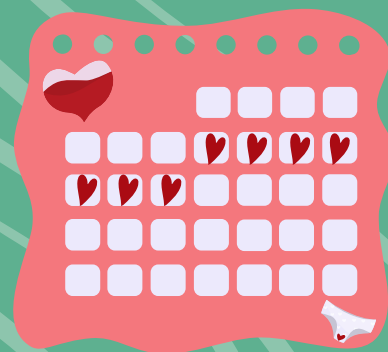


Body Changes!

- **Hormonal Fluctuations:** Brace yourself for some hormonal rollercoaster rides! Throughout your cycle, hormones like estrogen and progesterone are on the move, and they can mess with your mood, energy levels, and even how your body feels bloated and tender breasts.
- **Menstrual Cramps:** Ah, those cramps! You might feel some discomfort or even intense pain during your period. Blame it on your uterus, its contractions are helping to shed its lining. It's not the most fun, but it's all part of the deal.
- **Changes in Skin:** Your hormones aren't just messing with your mood they're also playing tricks on your skin! You might notice some breakouts, acne, or changes in your skin's appearance. Some lucky peeps see clearer skin after their period, while others might deal with flare-ups. It's all part of the adventure!



Period Stories !



I went to boarding school, and my periods just stopped. I was so scared and thought I was the next Mary, mother of Jesus. But then when I went back home, my periods started. While at school, they disappeared again. It happened for a year until I spoke to a nurse, and she said it was the temperature and food affecting my periods, which was normal.

Then, in my early 20s, it started again. I would have long cycles, sometimes I would miss a month. My doctor told me that for my age, it was normal; I was experiencing a hormonal imbalance, and it would stabilize. So I started to gauge; my period came late when it was cold, faster during hotter months, and if I traveled, my periods would totally delay.

Also, I noticed my periods wouldn't start until someone I was close to had theirs, which was just so funny, but it's been happening for 16 years. Taking the time to study my body truly helped. Talking to doctors helped ease my anxiety.





Mental Health Changes!

- **Mood Swing Central:** Ever feel like you're on an emotional rollercoaster right before your period? You're not alone! Those hormones can mess with your mood, making you feel all the feels which could change from happy, sad, or just plain blah.
- **Energy Zapper:** Sometimes, it feels like your energy levels hit rock bottom during your period. You might feel more tired than usual, making it harder to focus on school or hang out with friends.
- **Stress City:** Dealing with your period on top of everything else life throws at you can be stressful. From worrying about leaks to just feeling crummy, it's no wonder you might feel a bit overwhelmed.
- **Body Blues:** Your body goes through changes during your period, and it's easy to feel self-conscious about it. Whether it's bloating, acne, or just feeling meh about how you look, remember that it's all part of the ride.
- **Anxiety Avenue:** The anticipation of your period or worrying about dealing with symptoms can amp up your anxiety levels. It's totally normal to feel a bit anxious, but remember, you've got this

Menstrual Disorders and Conditions:

Menstrual disorders are conditions that affect your menstrual cycle, making it irregular, painful, or causing other problems. Here are a few common menstrual disorders:

- **Dysmenorrhea:** This is just a fancy way of saying painful periods. It's super common and can make your time of the month a real pain literally. Cramps, lower back pain, and headaches are all typical symptoms.
- **Amenorrhea:** This is when you miss your period for three or more months in a row. It can happen for various reasons, like extreme exercise, stress, or certain medical conditions. It's essential to see a healthcare provider if this happens to rule out any underlying issues.
- **Menorrhagia:** Ever have a period that seems to last forever, or the flow is super heavy? That's menorrhagia. It can be exhausting and even lead to anaemia if you lose too much blood. Treatment options range from medication to procedures like an endometrial ablation.
- **Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD):** PMDD is like PMS's evil twins more severe and can seriously impact your quality of life. Symptoms include severe mood swings, depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, and irritability. If you're struggling with PMDD, don't hesitate to seek help from a healthcare provider. There are treatments available to help you feel better.

Period Stories



There are times when my PMS really knocks me down. I struggle to find the motivation to even get out of bed, feeling overwhelmed by a deep sense of sadness that seems to consume me. It's as if I'm trapped in a fog of hopelessness, with no way out. But then, like magic, when my period arrives or passes, it's like a switch flips, and suddenly I feel like myself again. I recently read about PMDD, and it resonated with me, although my experience isn't always so extreme.

Some months, I feel surprisingly positive and motivated, while others, I'm overcome with the urge to dance, despite not being much of a dancer. And let's not forget about those two stubborn pimples that always seem to make an appearance right on cue. Despite the ups and downs, I've learned to take each month as it comes.

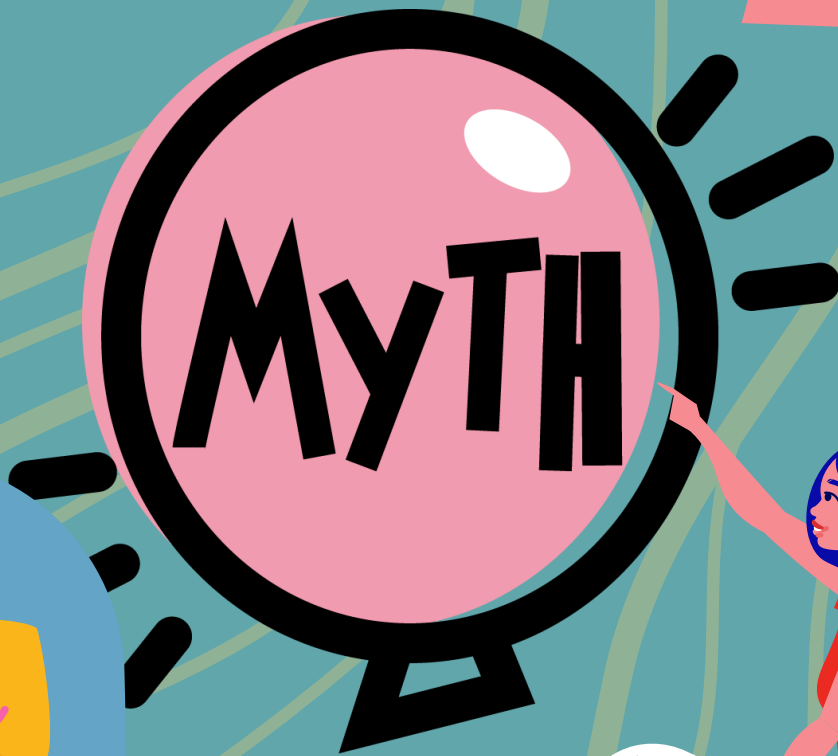




How to Handle Your Periods!

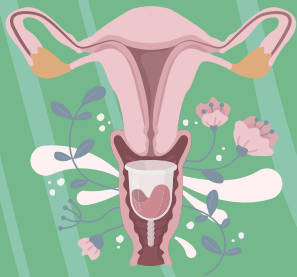
Here are some tips to help you navigate your periods!

1. **Track Your Cycle:** It's super helpful to track your menstrual cycle so you know when to expect your period. Remember, cycle days can change over time and aren't always strict. If you have an iPhone, you can use the Health app to track your cycle. If not, there are plenty of period tracker apps available for download that can help you determine when your period is likely to start. Even if you track manually, it can still help narrow down the week, but it's not a perfect science!
2. **Choose Comfortable Underwear:** Having specific underwear for your period can make a big difference in your comfort. Opt for breathable, cotton underwear, which is healthy for your vagina and can help prevent irritation.
3. **Stay Fresh with Baths:** Bathing is essential for staying fresh during your period. Aim to bathe at least twice a day, once in the morning and again at night. Avoid using scented soaps when washing the exterior of your vagina, as they can disrupt your natural pH balance and cause irritation.
4. **Maintain Good Vaginal Health:** Good vaginal health is crucial, so be sure to drink plenty of water and eat a balanced diet to keep your body healthy. Remember to wipe from front to back after using the bathroom to prevent infections. Speaking of infections, some common ones to watch out for include yeast infections and bacterial vaginosis.
5. **Create a Period Package:** Putting together a period package can help you feel prepared and comfortable during your period. Include things like soothing music, snacks (chocolate is a popular choice!), comfy clothes, and some painkillers recommended by doctors for any cramps or discomfort. you better understand your body. This section can recommend period-tracking apps and methods for collecting data on your menstrual cycle, symptoms, and overall well-being.



Myths about Periods!

1. **Menstruation Makes You Dirty:** One of the oldest myths out there is that menstruating people are somehow dirty or unclean. This couldn't be further from the truth! Periods are a natural and normal part of life, and they don't make you any less clean or hygienic than anyone else.
2. **Don't Touch Salt:** Here's a weird one; some cultures believe that people on their periods shouldn't touch salt because it'll spoil it. But guess what? There's no scientific basis for this at all! Salt is salt, and your period won't change that.
3. **Menstruating People Can't Swim:** Another common myth is that people on their periods shouldn't swim because they'll attract sharks or contaminate the water. Total nonsense! Swimming during your period is perfectly safe and can even help relieve cramps.
4. **You Can't Get Pregnant on Your Period:** While it's less likely to get pregnant during your period, it's not impossible. Sperm can survive in the body for several days, so if you have a short menstrual cycle or ovulate early, you could still conceive.
5. **Period Blood is Dirty:** Nope, period blood is just blood mixed with some tissue from the lining of your uterus. It's no dirtier than any other blood in your body. In fact, it's a sign that your body is healthy and doing its thing.



Bye Bye



As we wrap up this toolkit, it's important to remember that your period journey is just beginning, and it's going to evolve and change over the years. New symptoms may pop up, your period might behave differently depending on the weather, your diet, or your lifestyle, and that's all perfectly normal!

It's essential to be patient with yourself as you navigate these changes. Some days you might feel like crying or get frustrated with your period, and that's okay. Just know that it's entirely normal to feel a range of emotions, and it's okay to give yourself some grace. Remember, tomorrow is a new day, and you might feel perfectly fine then.

So, keep being amazing, keep taking care of yourself, and keep rocking it! If you ever have questions, concerns, or just need someone to talk to, don't hesitate to reach out to a trusted adult, healthcare provider, or even your friends. You're never alone in this journey.

Until next time, take care, stay confident, and remember, you've got this!




Love
SSF

PERIOD
power

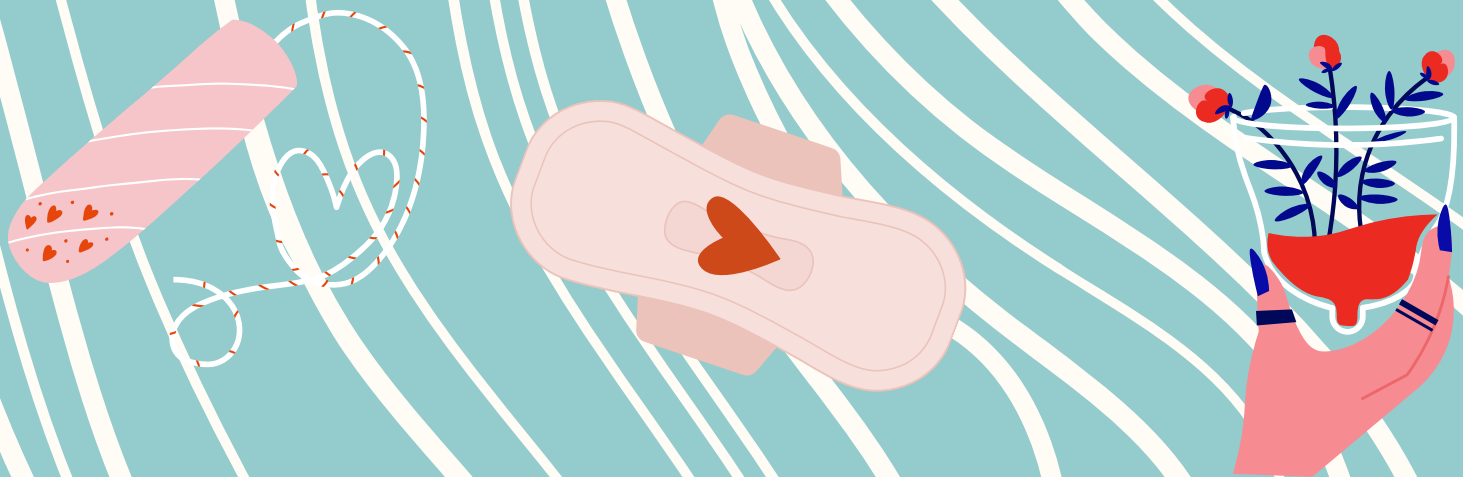
Eliminate
PERIOD
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End
the
Stigma
Stop
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Shaming



EMBRACE
YOUR
PERIOD



The Sistah Sistah Foundation is a feminist NGO dedicated to advocating for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), ending sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and advancing the rights of children, women, and minority groups. This menstrual toolkit was designed to assist teenagers in navigating their periods.

