

## Periods

### What are periods and why do they happen?

Periods are a completely normal and natural part of life for anyone with a uterus. Once a person starts having periods, their body is capable of having a baby.

During a period, the lining of the uterus breaks down and sheds. This is why people bleed on their periods: the blood which was lining the uterus has been discarded. The uterus has shed this lining because the egg that was released from the ovary was not fertilised, so the lining was not needed.

The most common age for periods to start is between the ages of 10 and 16.

### What do I need to know?

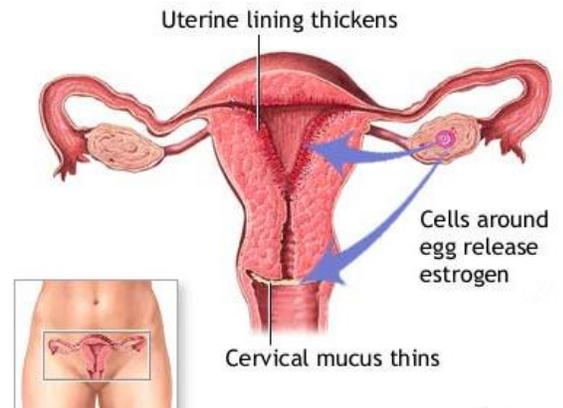
Periods affect people's lives in different ways. The key thing to remember is that someone who has periods can get pregnant. This means that, if they don't want to have a baby, they must make sure that they are using contraception if they are having sex with someone of the opposite sex. This is true no matter what time of the month it is. Sperm can live for up to 7 days in the womb, so don't have unprotected sex if you don't want to be pregnant.

A period usually lasts around 3 to 7 days, and happens around once every 30 days (but this can change depending on lots of different factors). The amount of blood lost in each period is usually around 3 to 5 tablespoons.

### Will it hurt?

The bleeding part of the period is painless, but many people suffer from period pain (also known as cramps). This is caused by the wall of the womb contracting heavily. Some people suffer more from period pain than others, and some periods can be more painful than others too. The pain can be managed by taking exercise, painkillers, hot baths and a hot water bottle (but be sure to ask an adult before taking painkillers and always read the label).

### What is PMT and is it a real thing?



PMT stands for Pre-Menstrual Tension. You will often hear it referred to as PMS, which stands for Pre-Menstrual Syndrome. It refers to the changes in mood caused by hormones as part of the menstrual cycle (the cycle that makes someone have periods). During the two weeks leading up to the period, oestrogen levels fall and progesterone levels rise, which can affect the body: for example, it can make people feel moody, tired, angry, and very emotional. PMT can be mild or severe; some people have it worse than others and some months can be different from other months.

The best way to deal with PMT is to keep a note of when it happens so that you can track it. Regular exercise and healthy eating habits can also help to combat PMT. If it becomes a severe problem, make an appointment to see a GP.

### **What are the different products I can use?**

There are many products available for dealing with periods. Tampons are cylinders of soft cotton which are inserted into the vagina. They are popular because they allow people to do sport and be active when on their period. Tampons must be changed every 4-6 hours in order to avoid Toxic Shock Syndrome and other illnesses.

Sanitary pads (also called sanitary towels) are another popular product. Most people start with these as they are the easiest to use. These are placed into the pants and they absorb the blood once it has come out of the body (unlike tampons, which absorb the blood before it comes out of the body).

Some people use mooncups, which are more environmentally friendly than sanitary towels or tampons as mooncups can be re-used. Another increasingly popular product is 'period pants', which are specially designed pants that are strong enough to absorb blood without the need for tampons or sanitary pads.

### **I've started having periods. What should I do?**

Always carry some kind of sanitary product in your bag, in case you start your period when you weren't expecting it. Follow the instructions on the label and be sure to change your tampon regularly. If your tampon becomes stuck, don't panic, but do let someone know and ring 111 if you can't get it out.

Be careful when wearing light-coloured clothing, especially when your period is due. If you do find that you have an accidental leak, do your best to cover it by tying a sweatshirt around your waist. It's a good idea to carry spare pants and tights in your bag too.

Keep a record of your periods - when they happen and how long they last. If you notice anything unusual about your periods (e.g. a change in heaviness, frequency or length), see a GP.