



Periods

What is a Period?

A person with a uterus and ovaries is born with thousands of tiny eggs (ova) inside the ovaries.

During puberty the ovaries start to release an egg every month (ovulation). Each egg (ovum) travels down the fallopian tubes to the uterus.

The lining of the uterus gets thick with blood and fluid to prepare for a possible pregnancy.

If the egg is not fertilised by a sperm, this bloody lining breaks down and leaves the body through the vagina. This bleeding is called 'a period' or 'menstruation' and usually lasts for 3-7 days. Usually up to about 4 tablespoons (or 80mLs) of blood is lost, but sometimes it feels like more!

Menstrual blood (period blood) can look different to the blood from a cut or a bleeding nose. It's often different colours and textures. There's nothing to worry about, but if you are worried you can talk to an adult you trust.

When a person first gets their period, it may not happen regularly. Usually, periods will get more regular over time and the person will have their period about once a month. The time between one period and the next is called the menstrual cycle.

Some people get their period when they are young, other people won't get their first period until they are in high school, or sometimes even college! This is all very normal, and you shouldn't be worried if your body is changing at a different rate to your friends.

The menstrual cycle continues each month until the body runs out of eggs, usually between the ages of 45 - 55 years of age, but sometimes earlier or later. This is called menopause.



What will my period feel like?

Everybody is different! You might feel a bit sick or sore in your lower abdomen (tummy), or lower back, get a bit cranky or tired before your period starts, or feel fine!

Period pain is caused by the uterus cramping as it squeezes out the lining.

To help period pain you can exercise, eat healthy food, place a hot water bottle or heat pack on the sore area, or have a warm bath.

If these don't work, talk to an adult you trust about taking some medicine to help.

If it hurts so much that it gets in the way of you doing things you like, talk to an adult about seeing the doctor.

What to do

When you get your period, you will need to do something to contain the blood and help you feel comfortable.

There is no reason why you can't keep doing everything you normally would do if you didn't have your period, but you may need to choose different types of products to help you manage your period during certain activities.

There are lots of options, and not everyone chooses the same products. Your options include:

- Disposable (throw away) pads
- Reusable pads
- Period pants (reusable)
- Tampons

- Menstrual Cups

For more information about period products, take a look at the back of this booklet.

Period Pointers

- The period product you choose is up to you
- Wrap used disposable pads or tampons in toilet paper or a paper bag and put it in one of the bins you see in public toilets or school toilets (called sanitary bins), or a rubbish bin. DON'T flush them down the toilet!
- Reusable pads, period pants and menstrual cups need to be washed every time you use them to keep you healthy and clean
- Carry your preferred product in your bag just in case you get your period when you don't expect it. If you are worried someone will see them, put them in a cute pencil case or makeup bag
- If you do get your period and don't have any products with you, you can use tissues or toilet paper on the inside of your underpants. Schools usually have spare pads available, so you can talk to your teacher or the school nurse if you need something
- Shower every day when you have your period—it'll help keep you feeling healthy and clean
- No one will know you have your period unless you tell them. Periods are private but it is OK to talk about them with someone you trust.

If you have any questions about periods, you can ask an adult you trust, or one of our friendly doctors or nurses at Family Planning Tasmania.

Product Guide

Pads

Pads come in different sizes, and have sticky strips on the back of them to keep them in place inside your underwear, where the opening of your vagina is.

They range from panty-liners for when you have very little blood, usually right at the beginning or end of your period, right up to very large overnight style pads which give you a lot of coverage for when you are rolling around in bed at night.

Generally, sizing works in this order, with the first size absorbing the smallest amount of blood, up to the last size absorbing heavy amounts of blood:

- Panty liner
- Light
- Regular
- Super
- Overnight
- Maternity

You will see that some come with 'wings'. Wings are just little flaps at the side of the pads which you can fold over your underwear to help to keep the pad from bunching up or moving around. Whether you use pads with wings or without is totally up to you.



Benefits:

- You don't need to put anything into your vagina, which some people can find uncomfortable or tricky to do.
- You are less likely to get blood on your hands when you are changing a pad. This helps if you need to change in a public bathroom where you may have to wash your hands in a shared space.

Downsides:

- Some people say they don't feel as clean using pads as other options, or that they aren't as comfortable to use as other options. You might find that you prefer them, though, so it's worth a try to find what you like best.
- The packaging is plastic and can make a noise while you are unwrapping them. Some people get embarrassed if they have to change their pad in a public toilet and others can hear the noise - although it is nothing to be embarrassed about!
- Pads are disposable so they can be expensive and they aren't as environmentally friendly as some other options.

How often do you need to change them?

At least every four hours during the day depending on how much blood there is. You can leave them on overnight.

Reusable Pads

Reusable Pads are similar to disposable pads, but they are made of cloth and you wash them instead of throwing them away.


Instead of sticky strips to hold them in place, they often have wings with buttons or press-studs.

Benefits:

- You don't need to put anything into your vagina, which some people can find uncomfortable or tricky to do.
- You are less likely to get blood on your hands when you are changing a pad. This helps if you need to change in a public bathroom where you may have to wash your hands in a shared space.
- They are reusable so are better for the environment than products you throw away.

Downsides:

- Some people say they don't feel as clean using pads as other options, or that they aren't as comfortable to use as other options. You might find that you prefer them, though, so it's worth a try to find what you like best.
- They are expensive to buy first but then you don't have to buy more for quite a while, as long as you look after them.
- Because you don't throw them away, if you do need to change them, you have to carry them around with you until you get home which can be messy and a bit smelly. You should think about having a



special little waterproof bag inside your school bag or backpack just in case.

How often do you need to change them?

At least every four hours during the day depending on how much blood there is. You can leave them on overnight.

Period Pants

Period pants look just like regular underwear but have extra fabric built into them so you don't need to wear a pad, tampon or cup with them.

Even though they are designed to be used on their own, some people use them as 'back ups' in case their other option leaks or on days when they have lots of blood.

You wear them like regular underwear, and you can get them in cool patterns and colours too.

Benefits:

- They feel very comfortable - you might even forget you are wearing special underwear!
- They are reusable so are better for the environment than products you throw away.
- They last all day, or all night, so you shouldn't need to change them as often as other options.
- Some companies that make period pants also make period swimmers/bathers, so you can go swimming with them on. This is something you can't do with a disposable or reusable pad.

Downsides:

- It is hard to change them in public bathrooms, because you have to totally change your underwear. And because you don't throw them away, if you do need to change them, you have to carry them around with you until you get home which can be messy and a bit smelly. You should think about having a special little waterproof bag inside your school bag or backpack just in case.
- Unless you do your own washing, the person who does your washing will know when you have your period because they will need to wash them for you. To wash them you put them under cold running water until you can't see any blood coming out of them anymore, and then put them in the washing machine with your other washing.

Tampons

Tampons are usually made of cotton or another absorbent material and are in the shape of a bullet or a tube with rounded ends.

You put them inside your vagina using clean fingers. Sometimes tampons come with a cardboard tube to help you push the tampon inside you - this is called an applicator.

Tampons can't get lost inside your body. If a tampon is in correctly, you can't feel it.

It has a string hanging from one end (you put it in with the string on the bottom end) to help you take them out - you just grab the string and gently pull.

Like pads, tampons come in a range of sizes, usually:

- Light/Mini
- Regular

- Super

Benefits:

- Tampons make it much easier to do activities like swimming.
- They are very small and don't make any crinkly sounds, so you can easily carry them around in your pocket without anyone knowing.

Downsides:

- Some people find it hard to put tampons in. An applicator can sometimes help, but you might just prefer to use something else.
- Tampons are disposable so they can be expensive and they aren't as environmentally friendly as some other options. You shouldn't flush them down the toilet because they can clog the pipes.

How often do you need to change them?

At least every four hours during the day depending on how much blood there is. Some people like to wear a panty liner or pad just in case they forget to change their tampon in time. You shouldn't wear them overnight.

Menstrual Cups

Menstrual cups are squishy silicone or rubber cups designed to use inside the vagina during a period.

A cup collects period blood rather than sucking it up like tampons or pads do.

You put them inside your vagina by folding them up using clean fingers, putting them inside your vagina, and then letting it go when the cup gets to the top of your vagina, near your cervix. It will unfold itself and go back into the cup shape so it can collect the blood.

Cups can't get lost inside your body.

If a cup is in correctly, you can't feel it. Just like tampons, it might take a bit of practice until you get it right.

You take a cup out by putting your finger inside your vagina and feeling for the top of the cup. Then you push the side of the top of the cup until you feel it release from the side of your vagina. You can then pinch the cup and pull it out, being careful not to spill the blood.

Benefits:

- Cups make it much easier to do activities like swimming.
- They are reusable, so they are very good for the environment.
- Cups can stay in for a long time without needing to be changed, which means you can put them in before school and then not worry about doing anything again until you get home.

Downsides:

- Some people find it hard to put cups in, or think it feels weird to put their fingers inside their vagina as much as you need to when you use a cup.
- When you use a cup, you will get blood on your fingers. Some people don't like that, and it can be difficult to wash the blood off your hands if you need to share the sink with other people, like in the school toilets.
- You also need somewhere private to be able to wash and dry the cup, and store it while you aren't using it.
- Until you get used to it, getting a cup out can be tricky and messy. Once you have figured it out, it's easy - but it takes practice!



How often do you need to change them?

- You can leave a cup in for up to 12 hours depending on how much you are bleeding. Some people like to wear a panty liner, pad, or period undies just in case the cup overflows. That's really rare, but if it makes you feel more relaxed then go for it!
- You can also use cups overnight.

Toxic Shock Syndrome

Toxic Shock Syndrome, or TSS for short, is a very rare illness. People who use tampons or menstrual cups are more likely to get it than people who don't.

If you have been using a tampon or a cup recently and

- are feeling very hot or very cold,
- are vomiting,
- have diarrhoea (runny poos),
- are dizzy,
- have sore muscles,
- are confused or fall over, or
- have a rash,

then you should:

1. remove the tampon or cup,
2. tell an adult you trust, and

3. go to the doctor right away.

To reduce the risk of getting TSS, you should keep yourself clean during your period by showering or having a bath at least every day.

You should make sure you don't leave tampons or cups in longer than you are supposed to and you shouldn't use tampons overnight.



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