



Introduction

Section 1: The Knowledge

1. [Myths and misconceptions](#)
2. Puberty
3. Anatomy
4. Menstruation/Menstrual Cycle
5. Missed Periods (Irregularity)
6. Menstrual Products & Hygiene
7. Common Questions and How to Answer Them

Introduction

This resource is designed to guide an individual or organization wishing to conduct teaching on menstruation. Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is being increasingly recognized as a challenge for women and girls particularly in a low-income setting. Evidence is still being gathered on how best to address this issue but what little data there is suggests that education is as important as a suitable hygiene product in helping women and girls continue with their usual daily activities, for example attending school.

Moreover, Irise believes that women and girls have a right to accurate information about their bodies to enable them to make informed decisions in their own lives. In this way, good quality menstrual hygiene management can be a basis for good long term sexual reproductive health.

Using this resource

This resource consists of one section which covers the basic scientific knowledge required to conduct a lesson and answer questions on menstruation. The information covered is based around important topics brought to us by over 1000 East African school girls when given the chance to ask anonymous questions about puberty and menstruation. The resource has been compiled by healthcare professionals using textbooks and literature searches to ensure accuracy.

Section 1: The Knowledge

This section covers the knowledge required to deliver teaching on menstruation and puberty to teachers, girls and boys. It is split into six themes based on anonymous questions from over 1,000 girls in East Africa. Each theme includes questions from the girls, core knowledge, key learning points and additional information designed to help tackle common concerns or misconceptions related to the theme.

Myths and mis conceptions surrounding periods

Currently, cultural practices and taboos around menstruation have a negative impact on the lives of women and girls, and reinforce gender inequalities and exclusions. Myths and social norms make their daily lives difficult and limit their freedom and participation in society.

For examples, in some cultures,

Women and girls are told that during their menstrual cycle they should not;

- Bath (or they will become infertile)
- Touch a cow (or will become infertile)
- Look in a mirror (or will lose its brightness)
- Walk in a garden (or the plants will wither)

Facts surrounding myths and practices on menstruation

Myths and practices challenged

Myths/ misconceptions about menstruation	Truths (Facts) about menstruation
Big girls are the only ones that menstruate.	False: Girls can start menstruation as early as 8 therefore size does not matter
You cannot get pregnant if you have sex during menstruation.	False: You can get pregnancy during ovulation well as there is spotting which can be mistaken for menstruation. Therefore, it is important for you to ABSTAIN from sex.
Men with AIDS are cured when they have sexual intercourse with girls before having their first period	False: You can get HIV/AIDS. Sex can not cure AIDS. please ABSTAIN
When you get your first period, it means you are ready for marriage	False: You are not ready for marriage; you must continue with your education. The Ugandan law forbids a child less than 18 years of age to be married because your internal organ is are not yet mature to carry a baby
Sex cures painful menstruation	False: Sex does not cure menstrual pains. Menstrual pains are normal, If the pain is too much see a health worker at a health facility
Menstruation is a curse	False: Menstruation is not a curse. It is a normal body change in girls and women, it is health and natural body blessing
If you carry a newborn during baby during menstruation, it will get a rash and the cord will not dry.	False: Girls in their periods can do all kinds of work including carrying new born babies. In order to carry the baby, you should maintain personal

	hygiene.
Menstruation is dirty and unclean	False: Menstruation is not dirty or unclean but girls should ensure personal hygiene such as changing sanitary pads, washing hands with soap and bathing regularly depending on the flow
If you delay to have menstruation by the age of 16 years, it means you are barren	False: It is not true that when you reach 16 years before you menstruate you are barren. However, if you reach 16 and you have not started menstruation, please seek medical advised from a qualified health worker

Puberty

Questions from the Girls

“Why do my armpits and private parts smell?”

“What are the signs and symptoms of adolescence?”

“Why is hair growing in my private parts?”

Key Knowledge

Puberty is the process by which boys and girls grow into adults. It is a long process which involves many emotional and physical changes. Although many of the physical changes mean that girls and boys can have a baby they must also mature emotionally before they are ready for this responsibility. Puberty can be a confusing time when many people feel angry or lonely. These emotions are common and young people can be encouraged to discuss their feelings openly.

Changes During Puberty:

Female	Both	Male
Hips widening Breasts growing Starting periods	Growing taller Getting heavier Pubic hair Hair under the arms Sweating more Pimples/spots Feeling emotional Experiencing sexual desire	Voice deepening Morning erections Wet dreams Growing facial hair

Key Learning:

- Puberty is the process by which a child becomes an adult
- There are many physical and emotional changes during puberty
- Although the physical changes mean that boys and girls can have a baby they must also mature emotionally before they are ready for this responsibility.

7

Teaching Tips:

- Divide the class into groups of 5-7 and ask them to discuss and list the changes during puberty. Each group presents their changes and you can add changes that are missing after all teams have presented.
- In case of an incorrect answer, do not say 'That is wrong'
Instead, you can ask 'Susan says xxxxx, anyone else with a different answer?'
When you get a correct answer, acknowledge it's the correct answer and continue with the next topic/question.
The students then learn that a correct answer is acknowledged and an incorrect or partially correct answer prompts further discussion.

Additional Information- becoming a woman:

- Irise has commonly encountered the belief that a girl becomes a woman as soon as she reaches menarche because she is now physically able to become pregnant and have a baby. This reinforces the idea that woman's main function in society is to produce babies.
- As highlighted in this section, young women also need to mature emotionally before they are ready to have a child. Becoming pregnant too young can not only cause emotional trauma but also has many health risks.
- If this comes up it can be useful to take some time to discuss the what it means to be a woman highlighting that it is about more than the ability to reproduce. Useful questions to prompt the discussion include: Does a woman stop being a woman when she goes through the menopause and stops being able to get pregnant? What about women who cannot have children or who chose not to have children? What do you think of when I say the word woman? Participants will often list a whole range of qualities, including emotional characteristics demonstrating the important message that a girl's journey from child to woman to mother is complicated and involves developing emotional and physical maturity.

7

Anatomy

Questions from the Girls

"Why do women bleed but not men?"

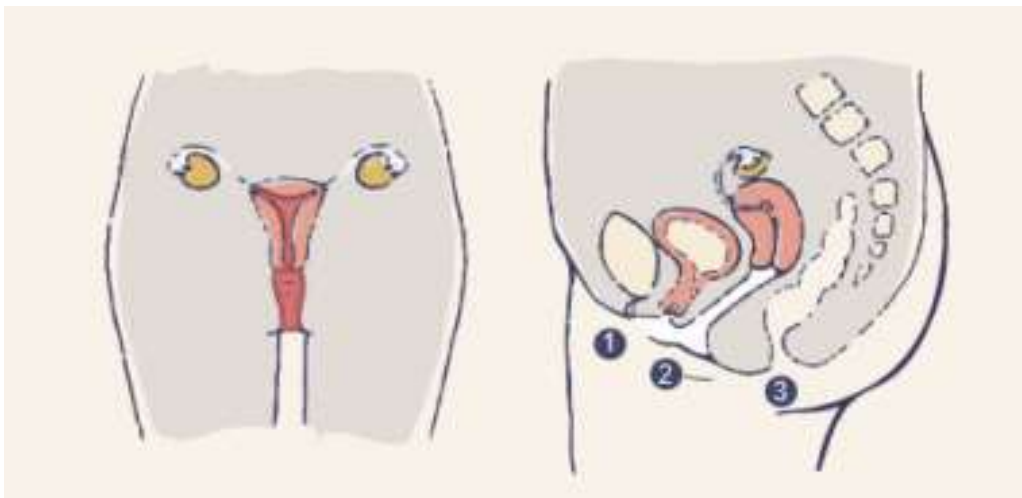
"Is menstruation a disease?"

Key Knowledge

It is important to teach young people about their body parts so that they have the words they need to ask questions and understand their own experiences. It can be challenging as some people find it embarrassing to discuss or even mention words relating to their genitalia. It can be helpful to remind the group that everyone has these parts and it is therefore nothing to be embarrassed about. It is also crucial for the educator to speak about the parts confidently and without embarrassment. Once the group understands the various body parts it becomes much easier to understand the menstrual cycle

External Female Anatomy:

Many girls are confused about the number of openings in their external genitalia. The purpose of this diagram is to clearly illustrate that there are three openings each with a different purpose or function.



Body part	Description of function
1)Urethra	This tube comes from the bladder and urine passes through it. The opening is separate and just above the vaginal opening.
2)Vaginal opening	This is the passageway from the womb which menstrual blood passes through and the penis enters during sexual intercourse. The baby also passes through the vagina during labor and birth.
3) Anus	This tube comes from the large bowel and feaces passes through it

Internal Anatomy

Uterus (womb)

This is where the egg implants itself if fertilised. The womb is the size of your fist. It expands when a foetus is growing inside it.

Fallopian Tubes (Oviduct) Connect the ovaries to the uterus – the egg travels through here after release from the ovary.

Egg (Ovum)

Matures in the ovary and is released into the fallopian tube where it may be fertilised by a man's sperm. It is tiny, just the size of a full stop.

Ovary

Contains a woman's eggs and releases one regularly as part of a woman's menstrual cycle.

Endometrium

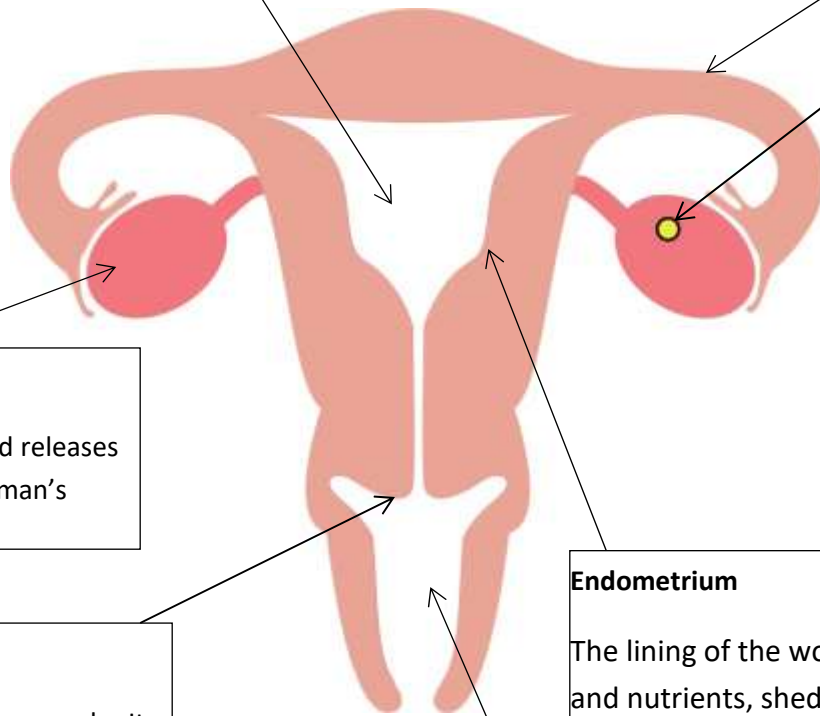
The lining of the womb, full of blood and nutrients, shed as menstrual blood if the egg is not fertilised.

Cervix

This is the entrance to the womb. It normally only has a very small hole which stretches during childbirth. It then returns to its previous size.

Vagina

This is the passageway from the womb which menstrual blood passes through and is the site of sexual intercourse.



Key learning

The urethra where urine comes out is separate from the vagina where menstrual blood comes out

The cervix only has a very small hole so objects (eg tampons) cannot pass through the vagina into the womb.

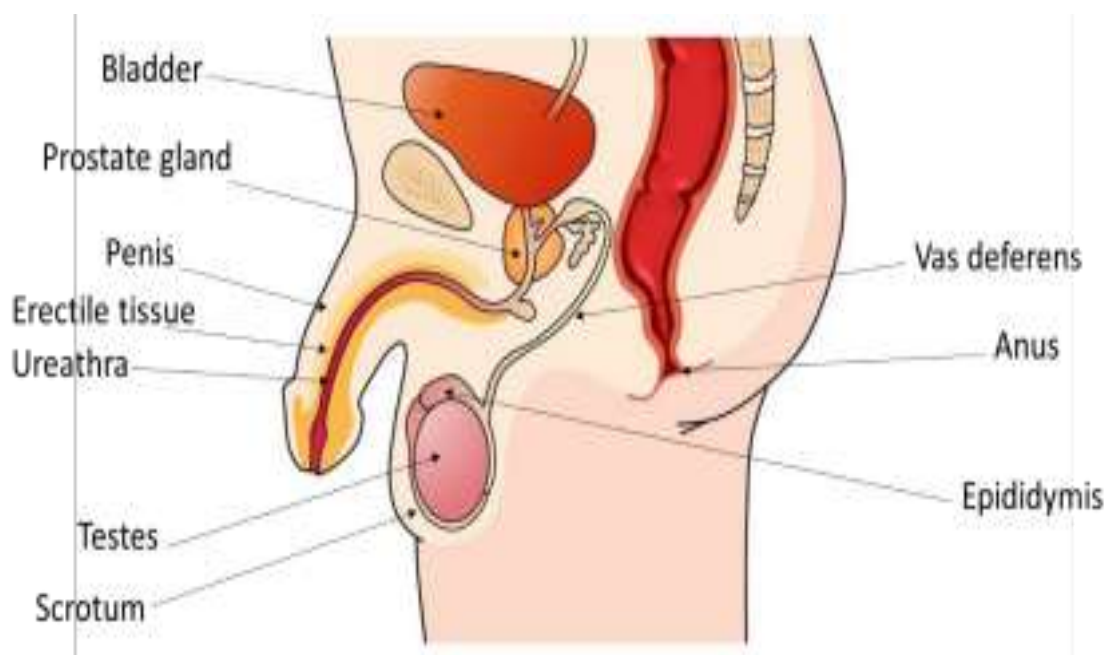
The womb is the size of a fist

Additional Information

Many people view menstruation as dirty or a disease. It can be helpful to discuss what menstrual blood actually is and where it comes from to see if that alters their views.

Often people feel differently when they realize that menstrual blood comes from the endometrium. It is also helpful to explain that the endometrium forms the placenta if fertilization takes place and supplies the

Male Anatomy:



Body Part	Function
Scrotum	A muscular sac that surrounds and protects the testes
Testes	Produces sperm
Epididymis	Stores sperm
Vas deferens	A tube connecting the testes to the urethra through which sperms are expelled
Prostate Gland	Produces fluid for the sperms to swim in
Urethra	This tube passes through the penis and expels sperm and semen during sex and urine during urination.
Bladder	Urine is stored here before it is expelled out of the body through the urethra during urination.
Penis	This is the male genital organ. It is filled with soft tissue that fills with blood making it erect during sexual intercourse.

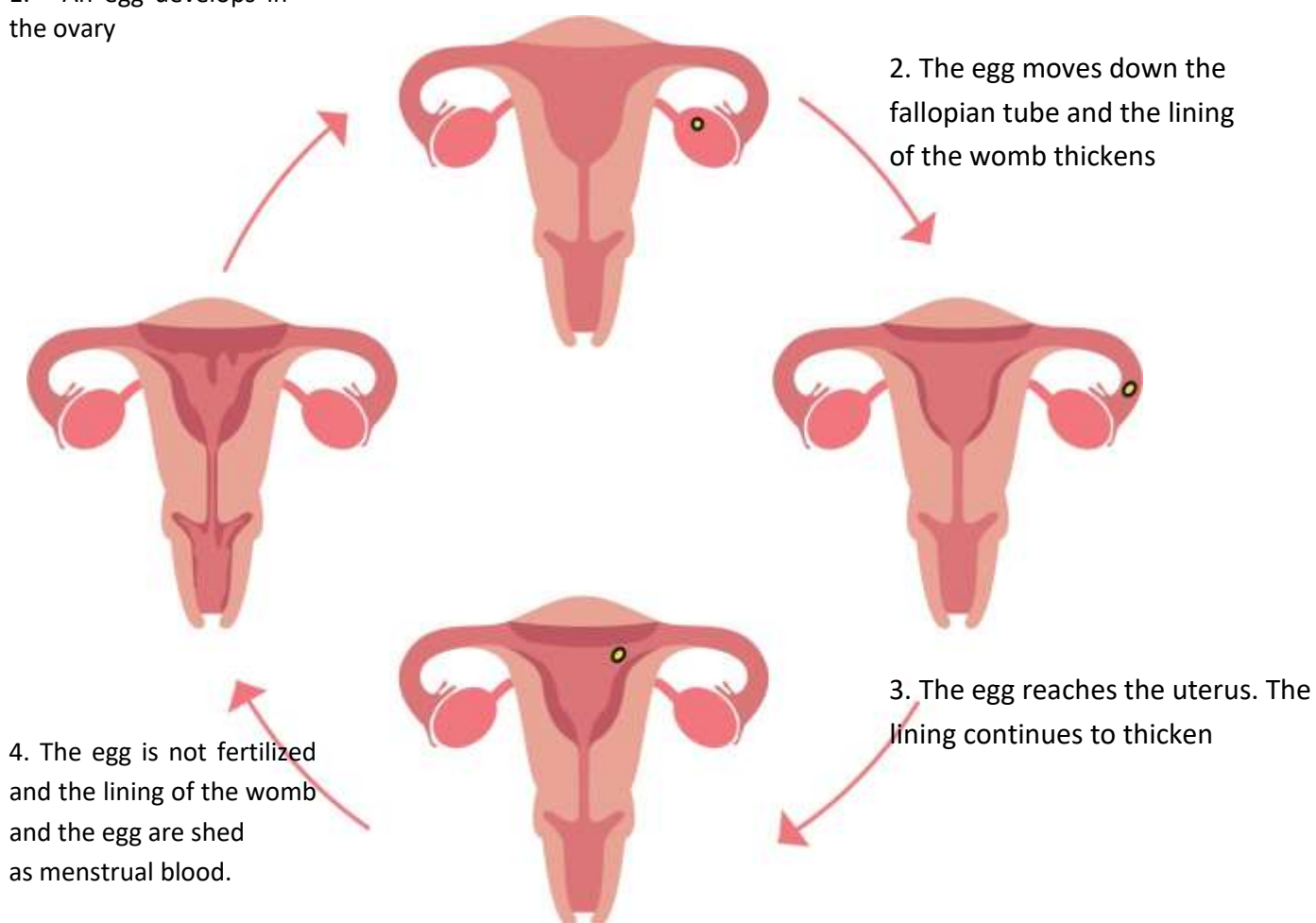
Key Learning:

- In a woman, the urethra, where urine comes out, is separate from the vagina, where menstrual blood comes out.
- In a man urine and sperm leave the body through the same tube, the urethra. • The cervix only has a very small hole so objects (e.g., tampons) cannot pass through the vagina into the womb.
- The womb is the size of a fist and an egg is the size of a full stop.

Menstrual Cycle

This describes the changes happening in a woman or girl's ovary and endometrium in preparation for an egg to be released and possibly be fertilized by a man's sperm. If the egg is not fertilized, the egg and endometrium are shed as menstrual blood and the cycle continues.

1. An egg develops in the ovary



This diagram describes 4 stages of the menstrual cycle where key events take place. In reality it is a continuous process with slow progression and sometimes overlap between stages.

If the egg is fertilized it implants in the womb lining and this becomes the placenta. The womb lining (endometrium) contains proteins and nutrients which would help a baby to grow.

- Menstrual blood is the lining of the womb being shed out because fertilization has not taken place. It is not harmful, dirty or dangerous.
- Most girls and women lose about 30-40ml (5 spoonful) of blood during their period. Some women

have heavier flow and others have lighter flow - this is normal.

- Whilst menstruation takes place another egg begins to develop and the cycle continues.
- There are no “safe days” during the menstrual cycle. It is possible for a woman to get pregnant if she has sex *without contraception* at **ANY** point during her menstrual cycle because:
 - The egg may still be inside the womb and does not break
 - Another egg may have already been released as part of the next cycle

- Sperm can remain in the womb for 2-3 days

Key Learning

- It's a continuous cycle
- Menstruation is the shedding off of the lining of the womb if fertilization has not taken place
- It is possible to get pregnant if you have unprotected sex at any point in your cycle
- The amount of blood lost during a period is small and not as much as most people think

Additional Information

“Safe days” are also known as natural family planning or the rhythm method of contraception. Many girls and women are taught that if they have sex during their period or in the 7 days after their period, they will not get pregnant.

This name is actually very misleading as these days are actually not very “safe”. Whilst it is true that it is less likely to get pregnant at certain points in the cycle, it is still very possible. In fact, out of 100 women using this method of contraception, 25 will get pregnant. If women or girls wish to avoid pregnancy they should be advised to abstain or use more reliable methods of contraception such as condoms or the oral contraceptive pill which are 98-99% effective.

It is important to discuss the cycle in as neutral terms as possible. We have commonly found women tending to refer to the egg as “waiting for fertilization” or “failing to be fertilized”. This can lead to the impression that the aim of every menstrual cycle is for fertilization to take place which again promotes the idea that a woman’s only function is to produce children. It is better to use more neutral terms such as “passing through the fallopian tube/uterus” and “fertilization not taking place”. If women are struggling with this idea, it can be useful to highlight that a woman has on average 450 menstrual cycles in a lifetime and therefore in the vast majority of cases fertilization will not take place.

Missed Periods (Irregularity)

- Many girls worry about being different from their friends. It is important to highlight that everybody is different but it is still normal. E.g., if one girl starts her period at 8 years old and another at 18, they are both healthy.
- Girls also worry about missing their periods or having periods more often than their friends. As we can see from the table some women and girls have short cycles so may have more than one period in any given month.
- It is important to note that irregular cycles and missed periods are **not** related to infertility. Women with irregular cycles can conceive and have a baby.

Questions from the girls

“I am 17 years old but I have not experienced monthly periods. Is something wrong with me?” “Apart from pregnancy, under what circumstances can one miss her period?”

Normal Ranges

Age/Length	Normal Range
The age at which a girl starts her period	8-18 years old
The age at which a woman stops menstruating (menopause)	40-55 years old
Length of each menstrual period (days bleeding)	2-10 days
Length of each menstrual cycle (1st day of period – 1st day of next period)	21-32 days typically, 28 days

Common Causes of Missed Periods/Irregular Cycles

The following are a list of common reasons why girls and women may miss their period or have irregular bleeding. Not only are these causes very common but they also mean the girl or woman are still healthy and should not be concerned.

1. Emotional stress
 - E.g exam stress, family problems
 - Stress causes an increase in certain hormones which can affect the menstrual cycle
2. Lack of food
3. Excessive exercise
 - Both lack of food and excessive exercise cause an increase in stress hormones which prevent the egg being released
 - The effect is temporary and does not affect a woman’s long-term chance of having a baby

- Exercise is very healthy and girls should be encouraged to exercise regardless of effect on the menstrual cycle
- 4. Age (the first 5 years from starting her periods and nearing menopause)
 - When girls first start their periods their cycles are very irregular and they can miss periods for many months. This is normal and girls should be reassured
- 5. Pregnancy and breastfeeding
 - Hormones released during pregnancy and whilst breastfeeding prevents further eggs being released or the lining of the womb shedding.
- 6. Contraceptives which contain hormones (e.g., contraceptive pill, depot injection)
 - The hormones contained in these contraceptives affect different women in different ways. Some women will find they have fewer periods, others will find they have irregular bleeding.
 - Contraceptives are not harmful but if a woman is unhappy with the side effects she should speak to a doctor or nurse about changing to a different method which she finds more suitable
 - NB condoms are a barrier method of contraception and do not contain hormones

Some people believe that other causes such as the weather, environment or a specific type of food affect the menstrual cycle. There is no scientific evidence relating to these causes but they may have an indirect effect such as causing emotional stress.

Key learning

- Normal Ranges: age of starting and stopping menstruation, length or menstrual period, length of menstrual cycle
- Causes of irregularity
- Everybody's different. It doesn't mean you're unhealthy

Additional Information – Infertility

Many of the questions raised about menstruation have one common theme underlying them... women and girls' anxiety about infertility. The information included in this section can be used to reassure most girls in general terms. However, it is very common for specific stories to be brought up in sessions, usually starting "but my friend...."

It is not helpful to pass comment on specific individuals and it is best to advise them to see a medical professional if they have serious concerns.

It is also useful to remember that sometimes people may have a medical condition which has not yet been diagnosed and may be easily treated. If someone raises any of the following symptoms, they should be advised to see a doctor.

1. No menstruation for more than 6 months if previously having regular cycles and not using hormone contraceptives.
2. Bleeding/spots of blood following sexual intercourse.
3. Any significant changes in a previously regular and established cycle eg sudden increase in pain or flow.
4. Pain that does not respond to simple pain killers and is unusual compared to friends and family.
5. Itching, spotting of blood, very smelly or discolored discharge between periods.
6. Warts, lesions or growths.

Pain and emotions

Questions from the girls

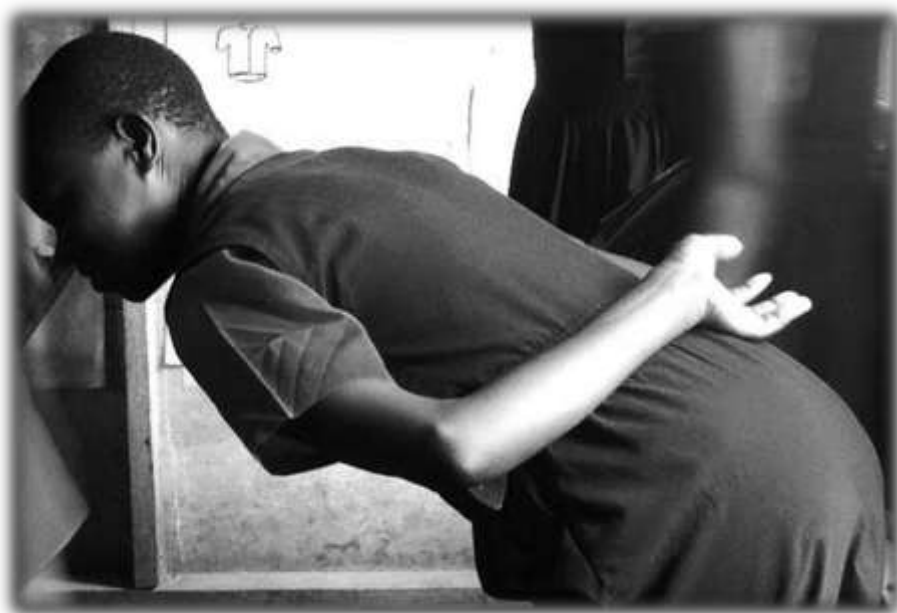
"Why do I get a stomach ache every time I menstruate?" "Why is that we feel too much pain during menstruation?"

"What can you do in your menstruation period to avoid stomach ache?"

Pain is a common and normal symptom during or just before a girl's period. Pain and other signs include:

- Abdominal and back pain caused by contraction of the muscles in the wall of the uterus
- Back and leg pain caused by tightening of muscles
- Headache and breast pain related to changing levels of hormones
- Bloating, loss of appetite and nausea caused by hormonal changes and pain

- Changing hormones can also cause girls and women to feel sad, lonely, angry and many other emotions around their period



It is good to discuss these signs and feelings with friends and family and support each other to feel happy during menstruation. The pain and other signs do not mean someone is sick and girls should try to continue doing whatever activities they would normally do.

Other way of coping with challenges during menstruation.

CHALLENGE	SOLUTION
Pain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache • Stomach ache/stomach bloating • Back ache • Painful breasts • Joint pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If at home, use a hot water bottle in a towel and place it where there is pain • Exercise to decrease bloating and improve your mental health • Use a painkiller to reduce on the pain
Feeling tired/general body weakness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink water especially warm water • Eating a balanced diet to improve your overall health and energy level, which means eating plenty of fruits and vegetables and reducing your intake of sugar, salt, caffeine and alcohol • Get enough rest • Take a warm bath at least twice a day

Anemia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink a lot of water • Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables • Take iron supplements • Foods rich in B vitamins may help fight PMS. Eat foods high in thiamine (pork, nuts) and riboflavin (eggs, dairy products) these are far less likely to help one prevent menstrual pain.
Mood swings – irritability, anger, crying spells, depression and anxiety may come and go in the days leading up to your period. Some women even have trouble with memory and concentration during this time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise can help boost your mood and fight fatigue. • Take supplements, such as folic acid, vitamin B-6, calcium and magnesium to reduce cramps and mood swings • Sleep at least eight hours per night to reduce fatigue

- Taking pain killers e.g., Paracetamol (Panadol) or ibuprofen
- Using a warm or cold towel on the affected area
- Doing exercise – this is a good distraction and releases substances called endorphins which make us feel happy and relaxed.

Key Learnings

- Causes of pain and heightened emotions before and during menstruation
- Tips for dealing with pain
- We should talk to one another to help overcome the emotional symptoms experienced during menstruation
- Girls and women should feel free during their period.

Additional Information

- Pain killers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen are cheap and widely available. They can be very effective in reducing menstrual pain.
- Irise has found that in some communities' girls are told that using painkillers for menstrual
- pain will cause their pain to increase in their next period, make them infertile or cause problems during childbirth. All of these beliefs are unfounded. These medicines are very common and have been proven to be safe over many years of testing and being taken by millions of people around the world.
- Another common myth around pain is that having sex or getting pregnant will improve period pain. Whilst some women find sex can be helpful as a form of exercise or distraction it does not have a lasting impact on period pain. Similarly, pregnancy will remove periods and therefore, period pain for 9 months but this will return after giving birth and it should be considered whether this is a reason to have ababy

Menstrual Products and Hygiene

Women and girls use a range of products to absorb blood during their periods:

- Menstrual cloth
- Disposable sanitary pads
- Reusable sanitary pads
- Tampons
- Menstrual cup

It is important to regularly change any product that is being used. This means at least every 8 hours.

Disposal of sanitary materials

- Open it for burning
- Temporary incinerator
- In a latrine pit
- Burying

Different types of products what they are made of, advantages and disadvantages.

Product	Information	Advantages	Disadvantages
Disposable pads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Made of plastic and cotton fibers - Use sticky gum to secure in underwear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure in underwear - No leaking - Easily Available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If not disposed of properly can block flush toilets or litter - Expensive to buy every month
Tampons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cotton based product inserted into vagina - Thread remains outside to allow removal - The tampon expands as it absorbs blood until it is full 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure – does not fall out - Can do all usual activities including swimming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If not disposed of properly can block flush toilets or litter - Expensive to buy every month - Not always available
Menstrual Cloth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cotton cloth inserted into underwear to absorb blood - Sometimes disposed of but more often washed and used again 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cheap - Easily available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leaks - Can fall out of underwear - If not washed and dried properly can cause irritation and infection - Many myths and misconceptions surrounding menstrual cloths (eg can be used in witchcraft)

<p>Reusable sanitary towel</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Made of cotton with plastic layer inside - After use it is washed, dried and reused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secured in underwear using press-stud or button - Does not leak - Can be used for 6-12 months before being replaced – this makes them more cost effective - Easy to make - Do not have to worry about disposal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not always easily available - Up-front cost can be expensive - Must be washed and dried well or may cause irritation or infection - Can be difficult if water and soap are not easily available
<p>Menstrual cup</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cup made of special kind of rubber (silicon) - Inserted into vagina - When it is full it is removed, rinsed and re-inserted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only need to buy one - Lasts for 10 years - Works out to be very cheap over 10 years - Can leave in vagina for 8-10 hours - No problems with disposing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expensive one-off cost - Not easily available in every country - Need to learn to insert correctly so it does not leak

Any cotton product (pad or cloth) that is being used, washed and used again should be soaked in cold water, washed with soap and water and dried thoroughly, ideally in direct sunlight. Wearing a damp or dirty pad/cloth may cause irritation or infection.

Good Hygiene Management

Keeping healthy during menstruation: nutrition and exercise

Feeling healthy and comfortable during menstruation is important for you. You need to take care of yourself by listening to your body. Always eat healthy before and after menstruation because your body loses a lot of blood. It is also important to have enough rest. Exercising helps the body to withstand menstrual pain therefore, exercise should be part of our daily routine.

Improving Menstrual Hygiene

It is important that you avoid risk from unhygienic practices during menstruation by maintaining good hygiene practices such as bathing at least 2 or 3 times a day, shaving your private parts regularly and changing your menstrual products or pads. This will help you not to get Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs) and other hygiene risks.

PRACTICE	HEALTH RISK
Unclean sanitary pads /materials	Bacteria may cause local infections or travel up the vagina and enter the uterine cavity.
Changing menstrual cups infrequently	Wet pads can cause skin irritation which can then become infected if the skin becomes broken.
Insertion of unclean material into the vagina	Bacteria potentially have easier access to the cervix in addition, the uterine cavity.
Using highly absorbent tampons during a time of light blood loss.	Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)
Wiping from back to front following urination or defecation.	Makes the introduction of bacteria from the bowel into the vagina (or urethra) more likely.
Unprotected sex	Possible increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (see below) or the transmission of HIV or Hepatitis B during menstruation.
Unsafe disposal of used sanitary materials	Risk of infecting others, especially with

	Hepatitis B (HIV and other Hepatitis viruses do not survive for long outside the body and pose a minimal risk except where there is direct contact with blood just leaving body).
Frequent douching (forcing liquid into the vagina)	Can facilitate the introduction of bacteria into the uterine cavity.
Lack of hand-washing after changing a sanitary towel	Can facilitate the spread of infections such as Hepatitis B or Rubella.

Good Hygiene Practices

- As a girl, you are at a risk of getting bacterial infections during menstruation. It is therefore important to stay clean. Some basic guidelines for maintaining hygiene during periods and throughout the month are:
- Wash your genital area once or twice a day.
- Use lukewarm water
- Use mild soap if you want to.
- Do not use perfumed shower gel or soap that can affect the PH balance.
- Only wash your vagina externally.
- Change your menstrual product every 4 to 8 hours during the day (depending on the method you use).
- Change your menstrual product as soon as you wake up.
- Use a thicker sanitary pad at night, Wear clothing that can breath, preferably natural fabrics such as cotton.

Materials and Products for Menstrual Hygiene Management

There is a range of menstrual products available and it is important for you to make informed decisions on what to use. There are disposable sanitary pads, reusable sanitary pads, menstrual cups and tampons. Cloth can also be a hygienic option to manage bleeding, when washed and stored properly. What is the most important for you is that the product you choose to use should make you feel comfortable using it and easy to change frequently to avoid staining, odor or infection.

- Clean rags can be used, either tied to a small rope around the waist or in underwear. Rags can be cut to fit in the panty area. Alternatively, rags can be used by sewing several layers on top of each other. Sanitary pads are made to fit a panty or to be attached to a belt around the waist. They usually have strips of tape that keep them attached to the panties.
- Tampons are made of compressed cotton formed into small, tube-like shapes and can be inserted into the vagina during menstrual.
- Menstrual cup is a sustainable cup made from medical silicone rubber that is inserted into the vagina to collect menstrual blood.

Having access to safe and clean hygienic materials and products will enable you better to manage menstruation. Hygienic materials also called good materials are those when used absorb blood; do not cause irritation and infection. While bad materials do not absorb blood, they cause fungal and urinary tract infections.

GOOD MATERIALS	BAD MATERIALS
Manufactured pads such as (Always, Secrets, Stay Free and Feather)	Toilet paper
Manufactured reusable pads (Afri pads, Eco pads and Relief pads)	Plain cotton wool
Cotton wool wrapped in gauze or a clean piece of cotton cloth	Sand and or Mud
Homemade reusable pads (made from cotton material)	News paper
Ruby cups (menstrual cups)	Sponge or mattress, pieces of papers, Banana fibers, Chicken feathers, Leaves or grass, Polythene paper, Rough dirty pieces of cloth nylon materials, Kaki and Kapira)

Key information

- When bathing during your period you should wash as you normally would
- Menstruation is not dirty or dangerous
- Washing the genital area with soap or other products can cause irritation and should be avoided. It is best to wash with just water
- Washing too much or inserting a finger to wash the vagina can actually cause an increased risk of

infection

- No one knows the correct number of times to bathe during menstruation, everyone is different and you should do what makes you feel comfortable
- Some girls are told it is dirty to have pubic hair especially during menstruation. There is no scientific evidence to back-up this claim. Girls should do whatever they feel comfortable with

Key learning

- Advantages and disadvantages of disposable and reusable products.
- How to wash and dry reusable products
- Everyone is different and people should feel free to use whatever product is right for them.
- You should not use soap to wash your genitals
- Avoid over-washing/douching

Additional Information

Some girls worry that inserting a tampon or other menstrual product will mean she will lose her virginity. However, a girl's virginity is not something that can be physically lost like a phone or an item of clothing. A

girl 'losing her virginity' refers to the emotional and physical experience of her first sexual encounter. The hymen is the piece of skin covering the vagina. It is sometimes used as a measure of virginity but this is unreliable and inaccurate for a number of reasons:

- The hymen may be damaged by injury, disease, medical examination or even physical activity.
- There are different types of hymens. Some are easily damaged some are very elastic and may be relatively undamaged by sexual intercourse.
- Some girls are not born with a hymen

It is possible but very unlikely that using a tampon will damage the hymen. When the tampon is inserted, the hymen stretches to accommodate it. Inserting a tampon into the vagina is unrelated to a girl's sexual experience.

Common Questions and How to Answer Them

Now you've read the important facts see if you can apply them to these common questions. Try writing your own answers to the questions before turning over to see the model answers.

1. Is a girl ready to have sex because she starts menstruating?

2. Where does the menstrual blood come from?
3. Why do women bleed and not men?
4. Can I see the egg when it comes out?
5. When can a girl have sex and not get pregnant?
6. Why do some pregnant women menstruate?
7. Won't a tampon fall out if I move or run?
8. Won't using a tampon or menstrual cup make me lose my virginity?

Model Answers

1. No. Menstruation is one of a number of changes during the time a girl goes from being a child to an adult. Although menstruation means a girl may be physically able to get pregnant if she has sex this does not mean she is ready to have sex. Having sex for the first time is an individual decision based on emotional and physical maturity.

2. The menstrual blood comes from the lining of the womb (endometrium). It is shed out if the woman's egg is not fertilized. It comes out of the womb through the cervix and leaves the body through the vagina. It does not come from the egg which remains intact.

3. Menstrual blood comes from the womb lining which is shed if the egg is not fertilized. Only women have a womb where a baby develops. If the egg is fertilized the womb lining will provide blood and nutrients to help the baby grow. Men do not have a womb and so cannot menstruate.

4. No. The egg is very small – 1mm. This is the size of a pin head or a full stop. You will not see or feel it when it leaves the body.

5. There are no "safe days" during the menstrual cycle. It is possible to get pregnant if a woman has sex *without contraception* at **ANY** point during her menstrual cycle because

- The egg may still be inside the womb and does not break
- Another egg may have already been released as part of the next cycle
- Sperm can remain in the womb for 2-3 days

Although it is slightly less likely a woman or girl may get pregnant if she has unprotected sex during or just after menstruation there is still a good chance she would conceive. If a girl or woman wants to avoid pregnancy they should abstain from sex or use a more reliable method of contraception (family planning) e.g. The oral contraceptive pill, the depot injection.

6. Pregnant women do not menstruate. Menstruation is the shedding of the womb lining when fertilization does not take place

END

