

Many girls drop out of school when they are menstruating. This is not a solution since it may mean missing a week of school every month which will cause you to fall behind. We hope this leaflet will give you the information you need to feel confident during your period.

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Other changes can happen during your period

Some girls experience body and mood changes around the time of their periods and many experience menstrual cramps during the first few days of their periods.

Cramps can be painful. You can feel them in your lower back or tummy. Some girls find their cramps get better as they get older. Sometimes they go away completely.

A light painkiller can help cramps. You can also hold a hot water bottle over your tummy for some relief. Exercising regularly helps lessen cramps, too. Hot tea, some herbal remedies and also eating liquorice has been known to help lessen cramps. If these things don't help, ask your doctor for advice.

Pre Menstrual Syndrome or PMS

Feeling Moody Some girls feel sad or easily irritated during the few days or week before their periods. Others may get angry more quickly or cry more than usual. Some girls crave certain foods, like chocolate. These types of emotional changes are normal and may be the result of premenstrual syndrome (PMS).

Pimples Some girls have an outbreak of pimples during certain times of their cycle. This is due to hormones. Usually the pimples associated with periods tend to become less of a problem as girls get older.

Why have I missed my period?

Although the earliest sign of pregnancy is a missed period, missing a period can mean more than one thing. You could miss a period because of stress, bad eating habits, weight changes or just irregular periods. If you're worried about missed periods, speak to a doctor or nurse. They will help you understand more about your own period and help you figure out what could be causing you to miss a period

When should I see a doctor or visit the clinic concerning my periods?

- If your period is much heavier than usual and goes on for more than 7 days
- When you haven't had your period in 2-3 months (You may be pregnant or you may be stressed)
- If bleeding happens in between your periods
- If you experience extreme cramping pains

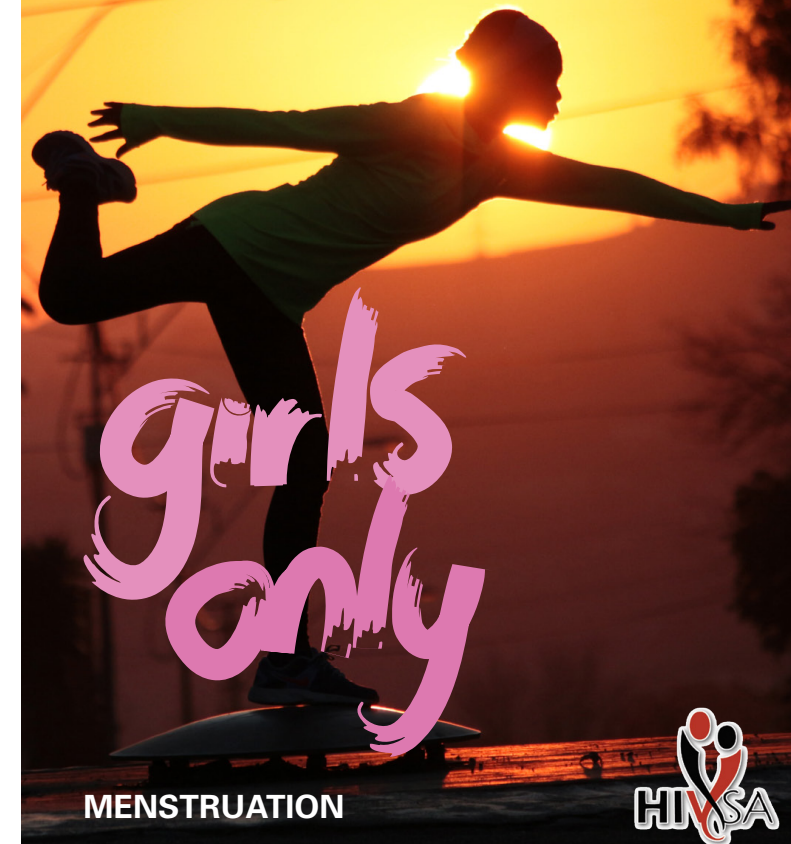
Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) is a life threatening infection that can occur, especially if you are using tampons. It usually happens when a tampon is forgotten inside the vagina. This can cause a dangerous infection, so if you do use tampons, make sure that you change them regularly. (see definition on page 9)

Symptoms : A sudden high fever, low blood pressure (hypotension), vomiting or diarrhea, a rash resembling a sunburn, particularly on your palms and soles, confusion, muscle aches, redness of your eyes, mouth and throat, seizures and headaches.

Myths about your Period

- **I'll lose my virginity if I use a tampon.**
Not true! You can't lose your virginity by wearing a tampon. Virginity is a "state of never having had sex". This means that a tampon can't break your virginity because it is not a sexual partner.
- **I can't exercise when I've got my period.**
Not true! Exercising is actually good for you because it helps ease the pain of cramping and also boosts your mood! So, you don't have to stop exercising when you are having your period. If you wear a secure pad you'll be fine.
- **I can't swim when I've got my period.**
You can swim! Just make sure you have the right period protection, such as a menstrual cup or tampon. If you are swimming it might be better to wear a tampon. If you're wearing a tampon, just remember to change it regularly.
- **I won't get pregnant if I have sex during my period. Wrong!** The fact is, you can fall pregnant. Here's why: Once inside you, sperm can live for 3-5 days. Ovulation can happen during your period or soon afterwards. So even a few days later, the sperm can fertilise the egg and result in your falling pregnant.

WHY GIRLS HAVE PERIODS



MENSTRUATION



7

8

9

10

For girls only

I've heard my body will change and that I'll become a woman and have a period. I've heard this means I will start to bleed. What does this mean, and how does it happen?

There is no shame in having a period. It is a natural thing that happens to almost every young woman. This leaflet explains what's happening in your body.

Puberty & Periods

Puberty is a time when your body begins to change to become more like an adult woman. Starting your menstrual period signals that you are growing up and your body is preparing so that you might have a baby someday.

A period is the 2 to 7 days that a girl or woman experiences menstrual flow when blood and tissue that leaves the body through the vagina. For most girls, it is about 2 tablespoons (30 milliliters) of blood. To catch the blood and prevent stains on her clothes, a girl can wear a pad, which sticks to her underwear, or a tampon, which is inserted into the vagina.

Most girls start their periods between the ages of 11 years and 14 years, but some start earlier or later.

What's actually happening to my body?

When puberty begins (between the ages of 10-14), your brain signals your body to produce hormones. Some of these hormones prepare your body each month for a possible pregnancy. This is called the **menstrual cycle**.

Girls and women have two ovaries. Each of these ovaries holds thousands of eggs, which are tiny (each no bigger than the tip of a pin). During the menstrual cycle, an egg is released from one of the ovaries (this is called ovulation) and begins a trip down one of the fallopian tubes to the uterus, also called the womb.

Every month hormones cause the lining of the uterus to become thicker with extra blood and tissue in case the woman becomes pregnant. If the egg is not fertilized with a man's sperm, pregnancy does not occur. If the woman's egg is fertilized by a man's sperm cell the cushiony blood and tissue lining would be needed so that the fertilized egg could grow into a baby.

But most of the time, the egg does not get fertilized and the lining is no longer needed. The lining of the uterus then breaks down and the blood and

tissue flow out of the body through the vagina. The discharge of blood and tissue from the lining of your uterus is your **menstrual period** (also called "your period").

The menstrual cycle then begins again. The lining of the uterus will start building up, and about 2 weeks after the last period, another egg will be released. That is why we call it a monthly cycle.

How long do periods last?

When you first start having your period, it may last only a few days. Your first few periods may be very light. You may only see a few spots of reddish brown blood. Anywhere from 2 to 7 days is normal. But this is not the same for every girl.

How often will I get my period?

A menstrual cycle is counted from the first day of bleeding in one month to the first day of bleeding in the next month. The average menstrual cycle is about 28 days, but cycles that are 21-45 days also are normal. It may take 6 years or more after your period starts for your cycle to get regular.

How will I catch the blood?

You can use a sanitary pad, tampon, or menstrual cup to absorb and catch the blood.

Pads, tampons and cups

To absorb and catch the blood, and to prevent stains on her clothes most girls use a pad, a tampon or a **menstrual cup**. A pad sticks to your underwear. Tampons and cups are inserted into the vagina.

Pads are worn inside your underwear to collect your menstrual flow (blood). They come in different sizes, styles, and thicknesses. Some have extra material on the sides called "wings" that fold over the edges of your underwear to help keep the pad in place and give better protection. A thinner, shorter version of a pad is a "panty liner." Some girls wear panty liners on the last days of their periods when the flow is light or on days when they think their periods will come.

You can buy pads or make your own from an absorbant cloth like cotton or wool.

Change or wash your pads often. Disposable pads and tampons should be wrapped in toilet paper or newspaper and thrown in the dustbin. Don't throw them down the toilet or your toilet may become blocked.

Tampons are made of soft cotton pressed together to form a cylinder-like shape, so that they can be easily inserted into the opening of the vagina. A tampon absorbs your menstrual flow, or blood, before it has a chance to leave the body. Tampons come in all different sizes and absorbencies.

Change your tampons often and dispose of them in a place where animals or children can't find them.

Menstrual cups are made out of surgical grade silicone and are inserted into the vagina to collect, rather than absorb menstrual fluid, and are a much healthier option for a woman's body. Menstrual cups have no negative side effects on a woman's body and there is no threat of Toxic Shock Syndrome.

When inserted correctly, the cup creates a vacuum seal to prevent leakage. The cups provide 12 hours of comfortable, leak-free protection, and can be reused for up to 10 years - making it an economically wise solution. Menstrual cups create relieve the financial burden of menstruation. Without having to budget for sanitary pads each month, girls and women are better able to budget for themselves and their families.