

Hygiene practices during menstruation

Dealing with menstruation hygienically is essential. Unhygienic management can result in reproductive tract infections and urinary tract infections.

Bathe at least once daily.

Ensure that undergarments and sweat drenched clothes are changed regularly.

Wash the genital area each time after use of the toilet, also after urination.

Use of toilets is very essential.

Cotton panties are preferable to synthetic ones as the latter hold in moisture and heat making it a breeding ground for bacteria.

If the underwear is soiled, it must be changed. Otherwise this makes bacteria to grow and cause infection.

Keep the area between the legs dry otherwise soreness and chaffing may develop.

Some amount of body odour is natural but regular bathing, washing and changing of cloth/napkins will ensure that it is not noticeable.

Change napkins and cloth periodically at least 3 to 4 times per day (preferable, after every 4-6 hours). Most importantly, once wet, the napkin/cloth should be changed immediately.

During menstruation, the outer genitals should be washed from time-to-time to remove any blood that is left. Hands to be washed every time the pad is changed.

Cloths should not be shared with others.

In the ancient days, people used to bathe in water sources like the river, pond, lakes etc. These were public places and when they took a bath in them there could be causes for embarrassment. So it was advised that girls desist from taking bath during their periods. However, now times have changed and we have the privacy of a bathroom or a separate place to bathe. It is advisable to take bath at least once a day in luke warm water to keep the body clean and avoid bad odour.

A normal process...

- Menstruation is part of every girl's/woman's life.
- This is absolutely normal; not an illness or curse.
- There is no need to be scared about getting the periods.
- There should be no shame or embarrassment around menstruation.
- It is not risky and dangerous to engage in sports and playing games. It is medically safe to do anything that you normally do during menstruation.
- There is no reason for a girl/woman to eat separately while having her periods.
- There is no impurity or pollution in the blood associated with menstruation.
- Practices such as seclusion or staying away from school should not be followed.
- Keeping a record of periods should help in preparing one to handle it effectively.
- It is important to communicate. Any doubts can be clarified by discussing with parents, older siblings, relatives, teachers and healthcare providers.



Basic Facts on Menstrual Hygiene Management



Puberty

...is the name given to changes that occur in girls and boys as they grow up. Most girls and boys begin to notice these changes taking place to their bodies between the ages of 10 and 14. These changes take place over a number of years and also include emotional changes.

Menstruation

...is the normal, healthy shedding of blood and tissue from the uterus that exits the body through the vagina.

...is also called a girl's/woman's "period"

...usually lasts between 3-7 days

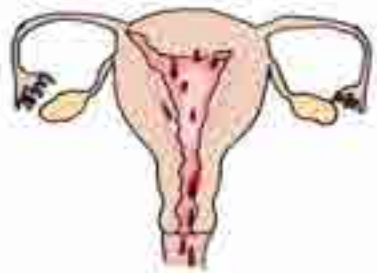
...happens for most about once a month (most menstrual cycles are between 28 - 30 days long)

...starts between the ages of 11 and 14

...is a sign that one can now become pregnant. Women stop menstruating during pregnancy but then start again after delivery.

Why does menstruation occur?

Girls have thousands of eggs in their ovaries when they are born. Every month, or about once in 21-40 days, one of the eggs leaves one of the ovaries, and travels through a fallopian tube. When the



egg leaves the ovary, this is called ovulation. As the egg travels in the fallopian tube, a soft spongy lining gets formed within the uterus. This lining is mostly made of tiny blood vessels. In case an egg and sperm meet to form an embryo, or a baby, that

begins to grow in the uterus, the lining will provide the nutrition. If the egg is not joined by a sperm, the lining of the uterus begins to break. The blood that is released from the broken lining flows out of the vagina. This bleeding is the menstrual period. This whole cycle is called menstruation.

Handling changes associated with menstruation

Cramps, pain, bloating, weight gain, food cravings, swollen or painful breasts, swollen hands or feet, skin problems, headaches or dizziness are physical symptoms that can be experienced.

Dealing with some of the above:

- Fill a plastic bottle with hot water, wrap it in a towel and place it on the abdomen
- Massage the abdomen
- Local remedies such as ginger or any herbal teas can be taken
- Eat a diet that is low in salt
- Eat foods high in calcium
- Eat foods like leafy green vegetables and fruits, which are high in fiber
- Take a brisk walk
- Mild exercises or yoga can be helpful
- A warm water bath would give some relief for the aches and pains.

If these do not help, one needs to visit a health care provider.

Sometimes emotional changes are experienced like short temper, aggression, anger, anxiety or panic, confusion, lack of concentration, irritability, nervous tension, fatigue, or depression around the time of one's period. Not everyone has these feelings.

Period time is a time to rest, relax and regenerate. Taking time out to pamper self will reduce one's discomfort during the period.

Use of absorbents

Girls and women use different ways to absorb menstrual blood.

Cloth - A pad made of cloth is folded and placed within the underwear, or passes over the private parts by means of a string tied around the waist. This cloth is washed and reused.

Use clean cotton cloth only for making the cloth pads. The used cloth should be washed separately and thoroughly with water and soap and dried in the sun.

Sanitary Napkins/Pads - These are disposable and should be discarded after being used once. Some sanitary napkins/pads are made with removable strips of paper that reveal adhesive tape that is made to stick to your panties. Other pads have wrap-around "wings" that wrap under your panties to keep it from moving or "bunching." Some may prefer

the belt model where the napkin is held using the belt. Pads have a plastic lining to minimize the spill of blood.

If one uses pads, she needs to bury them,

or burn them after use. Also, one can wrap the napkin in an old newspaper/waste paper and drop it in the dust bin.

Sanitary napkins are available with ASHA workers, local self help group members, teachers, and even at outlets like medical stores, etc.

- Sanitary napkins / cloth should be stored in a clean, safe and dry place
- Never flush a sanitary or cloth pad down the toilet as they will cause blockage
- They should not be left in the garbage pile