



# Your Guide to Puberty, Periods and Products

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## Guide to Puberty

**Here's a few tips and tricks to help you know what's going on and how to manage it.**

The first thing you will probably notice is 'growth'. Your limbs, your feet and your hands tend to be the first things that grow in size. This is a good clue that a tiny gland in the base of your head (the pituitary gland) has started the process of puberty by sending chemical messages, called hormones, through your bloodstream. These hormones set off lots of different changes in your body.

For most people (about 85%) you will then notice the breast area behind your nipples will begin to grow and your nipples might feel sore and tender. This is called developing 'breast buds' and it usually begins between 8 and 12 years old.

Soon after you may notice you begin to experience vaginal discharge. It's nothing to worry about – some girls see more than others. It is creamy white in colour and usually dries up in your undies.

The next thing to look out for is pubic hair growing (sometimes this is actually one of the first signs – for about 10-15% of people). Yup! It's going to get hairy down there!

You will also notice your body begins to smell differently, especially when you exercise – this is called body odour and normally begins at the same time as you notice pubic hair. You may want to have a chat at home about using some form of deodorant.

All this stuff is perfectly normal and nothing to worry about. It's good to know more about it so you can be prepared. Chat with a trusted adult if you have any concerns and remember everyone is a little different and things may not happen in exactly the same order or at the same age.

You will probably notice some changes in your skin and hair around this time. Both can be more oily and you may get some pimples on your face. Now is a great time to review your hygiene ensuring you are washing your face at least at the start and finish of every day – find a soap or face wash that works for you. You also need to bathe or shower daily, not forgetting to use a soap or body wash, especially under your arms and between your legs. Always rinse off with water after using soap. Don't forget your feet - they can start to whiff too! It's a good idea to make sure you are changing and washing your clothes regularly; daily for undies and socks.

So what's next? Well, you will continue your growth spurt – you might grow 2-3 inches in just a few months! Your body is also changing its shape – becoming a little more curvy particularly in your hips, thighs, breasts and stomach. You will put on some weight – your body needs to do this to stay healthy.

It's important to know that not only is your physical body changing, the way you think and feel is also growing. During puberty, the brain is finding new connections and this can affect your emotions, the way you are able to think and understand, your reactions and the way you communicate. Find some ways that help you relax and calm down and practice them regularly.

At some point during all of these changes your menstrual cycle will begin – you will get your first period. The most common age for periods to start is between 10-13 years old however it is normal for periods to start anywhere between the ages of 8-16 years old. Each person is on their own unique schedule. Once you get your period you normally stop growing quite so fast, however some people can still grow another 3 inches in height and body shape changes continue.

Let's talk more about periods!

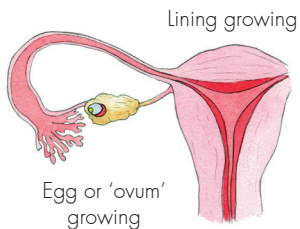


## Guide to Periods!

So, it's finally that time, puberty has arrived and your period too! There are lots of people experiencing these changes, so to help you, we have put together this guide to make sure you feel at ease as you start your new journey.

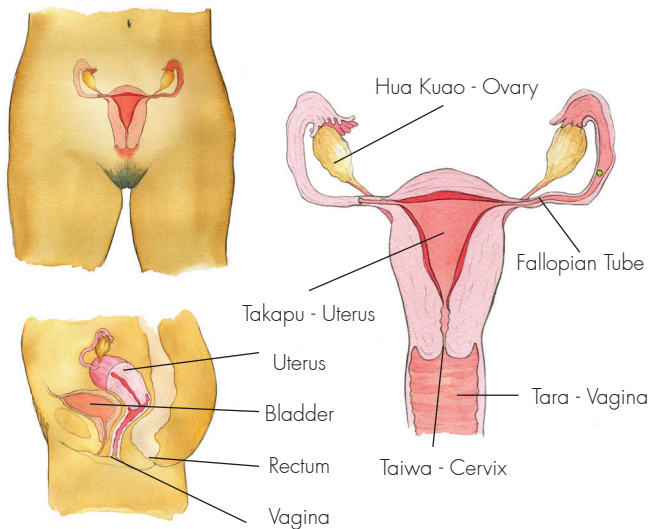
### Why do we get periods?

Inside your body, low in the pelvic region, you have a rather amazing body part called a **uterus** or a **womb**. On each side of the uterus is a **fallopian tube** and a gland called an **ovary**.



An ovary contains all of your reproductive cells. These cells are called **ova** or more commonly **eggs**.

You are born with about 1 million egg cells divided between the two ovaries. As you grow some of these cells dissolve away, so at puberty, you have about 400,000 remaining.



At the bottom of the uterus there is a passage called the **cervix**, which connects the uterus to the **vaginal canal** (or the vagina). The vagina is a tube (canal) leading from the cervix to the outside of the body.

The opening to the vagina is situated behind the opening where the urine (wee) exits the body (known as the **urethra**), and in front of the **anus**, where the faeces (poo) exits the body. This area (all the visible reproductive parts between the legs) including the inner and outer **labia** (the outer hairy padding and the inner fleshy 'lips') is called the  **vulva**.

Every month or so, following puberty, changing levels of hormones (chemical substances that act like messenger molecules in the body) mean:

- an egg cell begins to grow inside one of the ovaries.
- a lining begins to form on the inside walls of the uterus (womb) called the 'endometrium'. This lining consists of blood, fluid and nutrients.

After 2 weeks or so the egg cell is mature. At this point it is the biggest cell in the human body and is released from the ovary into the fallopian tube. This is known as 'ovulation'.

The egg travels towards the uterus through the fallopian tube. It can only survive for up to 24 hours after which it begins to slowly break down.

Even though the egg has broken down and reached the uterus, the lining of blood and fluid continues to thicken for another couple of weeks. At this point the body realises the lining is not required so the blood and fluid comes away from the uterus walls and flows out through the cervix, down the vaginal canal to the outside of the body. This happens gradually, over a few days and is called menstruation, menses or 'having your period'.

*Also known as: Aunt Flo! Dot! Monthly visitor! That time of the month! Crimson wave! Shark week!*

This amazing cycle happens every 3-5 weeks (on average: monthly) for approximately 35 years or until there are no more eggs to be released (known as Menopause) or a person is pregnant with a baby when their cycle stops until after the birth.

The reason for this cycle is to provide a safe space and all the nutrients for a baby to grow if and when a person decides to get pregnant. It may be easier to think about the process like this: during each cycle the ovary grows a new egg and the uterus makes a new 'nest' (lining) in case of a pregnancy. If there is no pregnancy it flushes it out and starts a fresh one!

If an egg cell and a male reproductive







cell (sperm cell) meet, fertilise (the two cells join together) and then settle into the uterus a pregnancy begins. Generally, the meeting of the egg and sperm occurs in the fallopian tube and over five days or so this ever-dividing ball of cells travels to the uterus where it makes a 'nest' in the blood and fluid lining. This lining provides the nutrients and oxygen for the fetus (the name for the cells as they grow into being a baby) in the very early stages of its growth. The body recognises there is a pregnancy and does not send the messages for the lining to detach so a woman does not have a period. By about 8-13 weeks pregnant a placenta has formed next to the fetus, which takes over providing its oxygen and nutrition needs. At about 38-40 weeks growth the woman will give birth to the baby.

### **When will I get my first period?**

It would be pretty awesome if every person expecting their first period received a text in advance letting them know exactly when it was going to arrive! It would say "*Welcome to the club! Your period is going to start on this date at this time exactly.*" You could then be super prepared with period products at the ready and your best friend at hand! Unfortunately this isn't how it happens but a little information goes a long way to feeling confident in dealing with your period.

Periods are very individual and vary

from one person to another. On average they begin between the ages of 10 and 13, however they can begin as young as 8 or as late as age 16. As a general rule, periods begin about 2.5 years after you first notice signs of puberty – so if you saw pubic hair at ~9 years old you could get your period ~11.5 years old. Periods are another sign a person is going through puberty and are the most natural thing in the world.

Some of the signs a person's period (or menstrual cycle) is about to begin are: they may have noticed their body shape changing, some weight gain, height increase, pubic hair, breast development and a clear, white or yellowish discharge from their vagina (not necessarily in that order).

### **How often will I get my period?**

As you start each new period that day becomes Day 1 of your next Menstrual Cycle. Periods most often occur on a 27-28 day cycle however 21 days to 35 days is within the normal range. A Menstrual Cycle is calculated by marking the first day of bleeding (also known as Last Menstrual Period: LMP) and then counting until the day before the next menstrual period starts. So, if you start bleeding on the 1st of November and then you start the first day of your next period on the 29th November that would be a 28 day cycle. We recommend you keep a diary, calendar or an app on your



device/smart phone so you can keep track of your periods and what 'normal' is for you.

### **Will I know when each period is coming?**

For subsequent periods some people experience signs just before each period such as tender breasts and some tummy swelling, however others don't notice anything at all. Some people feel a bit moody, have lower back pain, mild tummy cramping or may feel grumpy or even tearful. All these symptoms are very normal and nothing to worry about. It's also quite common to have some early stage



## Tip:

- Pip's period begins on 9th March so this is their new Day 1 (also known as their LMP)
- Pip marks this on the calendar by putting a cross on the date
- Pip's period finishes on the evening of 13th March, so their Period Length is five days.
- Pip draws a line through these five dates on the calendar
- Pip's next period begins on April 6th, so her Cycle Length is 28 days for March/April (don't forget: the last date they count is the day before their next period arrived)
- Pip records this number and is now waiting to see what their next Cycle Length will be.
- As Pip's cycle is becoming more regular, they can predict when their next period is likely to arrive.
- Pip can even highlight future dates their period may arrive to remind themselves to have supplies in their bag.

'spotting' a few days before your period. As time goes on your period should become more regular and you will begin to understand what your 'normal' is. For some people their periods become regular and predictable very quickly and for others it can take some time. If it isn't regular after 12-18 months have a chat with your School Nurse/Practice Nurse or GP. It can take up to 4 to 6 years for your menstrual patterns to become well established.

## How long does each period last?

Periods usually last between 3 and 7

days and are often heavier over the first few days, getting lighter towards the end until it stops.

Most menstruators will lose a relatively small amount of blood during their period, approximately 2-4 tablespoons (~30-60 mls) although it can often feel and look like much more.

Have a chat with your School Nurse/Practice Nurse or GP if you consistently notice your period lasts longer than 7 days and/or you are bleeding heavily (more than 80 mls – needing to change your pad every hour or two).

## How will I feel during my period?

It's not uncommon to experience some mild lower tummy cramping or low back aches. You may feel tired or even a bit grumpy, tearful or hungry. However, if you have pain in your stomach, back or legs which regularly requires pain medication have a chat with your School Nurse/Practice Nurse or GP. It's important to rest as much as you feel you need to and to take some quiet time if you choose. This is a good time to catch up on some sleep and have a few early nights to recharge your batteries. Eat lots of nutritious foods and drink plenty of water. Gentle exercise, stretching and applying a gentle heat (wheat bag/hot water bottle) are good ways to relieve stress and minimise tummy aches.

## What's PMS?

PMS is an acronym for Pre Menstrual Syndrome. Some people really notice this whilst others are hardly affected. PMS is the result of changing hormones in your body that can make you feel grumpy, hungry, tired, clumsy, emotional and even angry. Some menstruators will also crave sugary highly processed foods such as chocolate. These symptoms disappear once you have your period however if you are affected badly it is a good idea to see your School Nurse/Practice Nurse or GP. Supplements such as Vitamin B6 and essential fatty acids can help to bring relief.



## What healthy things can I do when I have my period?

It's not uncommon to feel a bit tired when you have your period, so rest is very important. It's also a good idea to do some gentle exercise such as walking, riding a bike, yoga, dancing or swimming which can help with low energy levels and tummy cramps. A healthy diet is also essential and we recommend you have lots of whole foods including fresh fruit & vegetables, good quality proteins and nutrient dense grains. It's also important to avoid junk foods as these can make you feel tired and deplete your body. Remember to drink lots of fresh water and herbal teas are great too.



### **Can I go swimming when I have my period?**

The answer is yes! You can go swimming however you will need to use a tampon, a menstrual cup or specially designed swimwear, not a pad. Tampons, menstrual cups or special period togs can be a good idea if you play lots of sports, as they are less bulky and more comfortable during exercise but it's up to you as to what you feel most comfortable with. If you are using pads just write a note or tell your Teacher you are unable to swim for the time you have your period.

### **What should I do if my period starts in school?**

It's a good idea to start carrying some pads, a menstrual cup, period undies or tampons in your school bag all the time as it is sometimes difficult to know exactly when your period will start, especially in the early days of having your period. It can take a while for your periods to get into a regular, predictable pattern.

If you have no products at home, forget to put tampons or pads in your school bag or your period starts earlier than expected, ask the School Nurse, Teacher or a trusted friend. You will find that the school office or Nurse will have a supply of tampons and pads that you can use.

If your period starts during a lesson, wrap a jumper or jacket around your waist and ask to be excused from class. Find the School Nurse, teacher or go to the school office for help. It's often a good idea to pack a clean pair of undies in your school bag just in case.

### **What should I use when I get my period?**

You will need to use either sanitary pads (washable or disposable), tampons, a menstrual cup, period underwear or a combination of these whilst you have your period. The idea is to protect your clothing and help keep you feeling fresh, comfortable and clean.



Sanitary pads fit inside your undies and are secured by an adhesive backing strip (or poppers if washable), which keeps them in place.

Menstrual underwear has absorbency sewn into the gusset and are washable and reusable.

Tampons are available with or without applicators and come in different sizes designed to suit your individual flow (ideally changed every 4 hours and not used overnight).

Menstrual Cups are used similarly to tampons in that they sit inside the vaginal canal. However, instead of absorbing your period the cup collects

the blood and fluid, which is then emptied by removing the cup and flushing the contents down the toilet. The cup is then cleaned & re-inserted and can be used over and over unlike tampons.

Using a tampon or menstrual cup in no way means your body has changed or that you are viewed in a different way. It is simply a way to absorb or collect the blood flow internally.



## Guide to Period Products!

We are often asked about the differences between the products designed for use when you have your period. It can be confusing! There are different types, different brands, different sizes and even special period undies. There are choices between disposable and washable types. Choosing your ideal product is individual to you and your choices may be because of cultural or personal reasons or because you are managing a disability. You may want to try a variety of products and you may change your mind as you become more used to having your period.

*Read on for more information about the options available and their use. Remember, you can use a variety of products and even mix it up a bit. There's no pressure: do what suits you!*

### - Pads & Washable Period Underwear

Pads and washable underwear are products designed to be worn on the outside of your body. Pads are worn inside your undies and period underwear has absorbency sewn into it. Sometimes it is easier to start with these types of products when you first get your period as they can be easier to manage. It is totally up to you!

### - Pads (disposable and washable)

Pads are products designed to absorb your period whilst fitting snugly inside your underwear. They come with an adhesive strip on one side, which stick onto your undies. Some have 'wings' which are also sticky and fold around the sides of your underwear. If the pad is washable they will not be sticky but instead the 'wings' popper up around your underwear to keep them in place.

### When to change your pad

Though your needs will depend on your individual flow, you should change your pad every 4-6 hours during the day. If you are using a washable pad you will need to store it inside a waterproof bag until you are able to rinse and wash it.

Choose a specially designed night-time pad or a larger pad to avoid having to change your pad overnight.



### - Period Underwear

Period undies are special underwear with absorbency sewn into the gusset and are washable and reusable. You can choose different undies for different absorbency needs. They look very similar to regular undies.

### When to change your period undies

Though your needs will depend on your individual flow, you should change your washable undies every 4-6 hours (or longer depending on the make) during the day. You will need to store them inside a waterproof bag until you are able to rinse and wash them.

### How to wash your period undies

It's easy! Just rinse, squeezing the gusset (the part where the blood is) under the tap until it runs clear. Pop them in the washing machine with a load of clothes on a cold wash. Do not use any fabric conditioner (this makes them less absorbent). Dry on the washing line (do not tumble dry them).

### - Tampons & Cups

Cups and tampons are products designed to either absorb or collect your period on the inside of your body. They sit inside your vaginal canal.

If you have never used a tampon or a cup before it is a good idea to relax and take your time. If you are tense your muscles may tighten up which may make inserting a tampon or cup feel a bit uncomfortable.

A common question when using internal products is 'do I need to change my tampon/cup every time I urinate (go for a wee)?'. The answer is 'no – the tampon/cup is in your vagina and the urine exits from the urethra which is a different opening'.

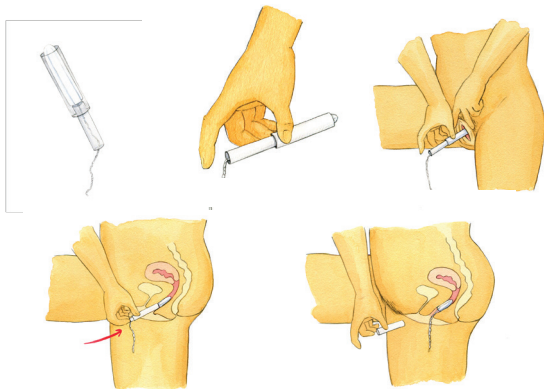
It is important not to use a tampon unless you actually have your period. The fluid sometimes noticeable in between your periods, or before your periods start, is called cervical mucus or vaginal discharge. This is a clear, white or yellow fluid/paste which can also sometimes be seen dried in your underwear. This fluid should not be soaked up by a tampon. It is perfectly normal to see this fluid from puberty onwards and nothing to worry about.





### If you decide to use a Tampon:

The first step is always to **wash your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water**. With dry hands unwrap the tampon.

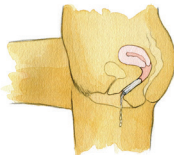
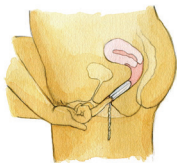
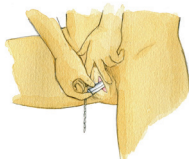


### Applicator Tampon:

1. Sit or stand in a comfortable position, some people prefer to stand with one leg on the toilet seat while others prefer to squat. Hold the applicator between your thumb and index finger at the point where the smaller inner tube inserts into the larger outer tube. Make sure the string is visible and pointing away from your body.
2. With your other hand gently pull back the skin (labia) that covers the opening of the vagina. Place the rounded tip of the outer applicator tube to your vaginal opening. Push the applicator into the vaginal opening, aiming for the small of your back. Stop when your fingers touch your body and the outer tube of the applicator is completely inside your vagina.
3. Once the outer tube of the applicator is inside your vagina, use your index finger to push the inner tube into the outer tube. This action pushes the tampon inside your vagina.
4. Once the inner tube is completely inside the outer tube, gently remove the applicator and dispose of it.
5. Always finish by **washing your hands thoroughly**.

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### Non-Applicator Tampon:

1. Unravel the removal string from the base of the tampon. Sit or stand in a comfortable position, some people prefer to stand with one leg on the toilet seat while others prefer to squat. Hold the tampon at the base (the string end) between your thumb and index finger. Make sure the string is visible and pointing away from your body.
2. With your other hand gently pull back the skin (labia) that covers the opening of the vagina. Place the tampon to your vaginal opening and insert it with your finger into your vaginal canal. Push the tampon into your vagina as far back as possible.
3. The process is much easier when your body posture is relaxed. It is correctly inserted when you cannot feel it anymore. If you can still feel the tampon, it needs to be inserted deeper. The string should now be hanging outside your vagina, accessible for when you are ready to remove the tampon.
4. Always finish by **washing your hands thoroughly.**



### When to change your tampon

Though your needs will depend on your individual flow, you should change your tampon 3–6 times a day (recommended every 4 hours).

Use the lowest absorbency tampon needed to suit that day's flow. If you need to change it more often than that, try a tampon with a higher absorbency rating.

If changing your tampon is uncomfortable and the tampon still shows white after the recommended time, try a tampon with a lower absorbency rating.

Never use bigger tampons (more absorbent) to extend the time a single tampon may be used.

### How to remove a tampon

1. Relax and gently pull the removal string so that the tampon slides out.
2. If for some reason you cannot find the removal string, it can usually be reached from a squatting position using your fingers. Remember to remove the current tampon before inserting another and always remember to remove the last tampon at the end of your period.
3. Wrap up the used tampon securely and dispose of it in a sanitary disposal, a bin or compost if product is 100% completely organic.

### Disposing of your tampons and pads

Some pads and tampons (and their wrappers) are made from bio-materials so are compostable and will break down into their natural elements. If so, you can either compost them or put them into the rubbish where they will go into the landfill.

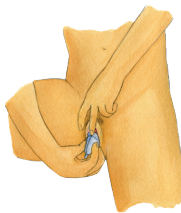
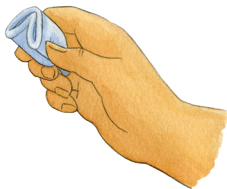
Whether or not they are biodegradable, pads, tampons, applicators and wrappers **should not be flushed down the toilet** as this can clog the system. They can be wrapped in toilet paper or the wrapper of the next one and disposed of in an allocated bin.



### If you decide to use a Cup:

There are various sizes and brands of Cups and some that are easier to use if you have a disability which makes handling them difficult. It is a good idea to investigate getting the right one for you.

The first step is always to **wash your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water.**



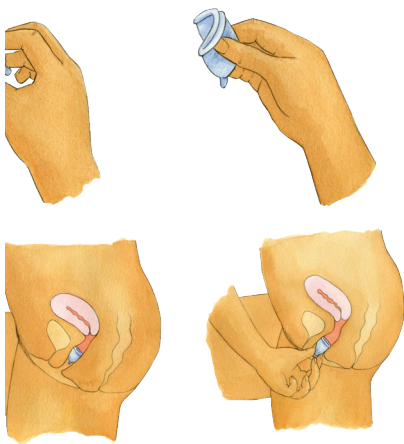
1. Position your cup so the opening is at the top and the stem at the bottom. Holding the cup between your thumb and index finger squeeze or fold the opening of the cup together - there are various types of folds you can use, and gently insert into the vaginal canal.
2. The process is much easier when your body posture is relaxed. Push the cup into your vagina as far back as possible. It is correctly inserted when you cannot feel it anymore. If you can still feel the cup, it needs to be inserted deeper.

In some cases you may need to trim the stem of the cup – refer to the instructions provided with your cup.

3. Always finish by **washing your hands thoroughly.**

### When to change your cup

Though your needs will depend on your individual flow, you should change your Cup at least every 8 - 12 hours. Follow the individual brand's instructions on how to clean your Cup every time you empty it and for storage in between periods.



### How to remove a cup

1. Relax and gently insert your thumb and index finger into your vaginal canal until you feel the stem of the cup. Move your index finger along the outside of the cup to break any seal.
2. Gently pull the cup out and pour the blood & fluid into the toilet.
3. Clean the cup as the instructions state and reinsert.
4. At the end of your period sterilise your cup as stated in the instructions and store in its bag until your next period.

### **\*\* TOXIC SHOCK (TSS)**

#### **Information:**

*Toxic Shock syndrome is a rare but serious medical condition caused by a bacterial infection. It is caused when the bacterium 'Staphylococcus Aureus' gets into the bloodstream and produces toxins.*

*Although toxic shock syndrome has been linked to superabsorbent tampon use in those that menstruate, this condition can affect all genders of all ages.*

*Symptoms of toxic shock syndrome can vary from person to person.*

*In most cases, symptoms appear suddenly. Common signs of this condition include: sudden fever, low blood pressure; headache, muscle aches, confusion, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting, rash, redness of eyes, mouth, and throat, seizures.*

*If you experience the above symptoms after using tampons or after a surgery or skin injury, contact your doctor immediately.*



Did you know Nest Consulting provide awesome unisex programmes in schools talking all things puberty, periods and body image?

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