

MANAGING YOUR PERIODS WITH CONFIDENCE

A manual for girls in Christian and
Muslim primary schools

INTRODUCTION

This guide is about puberty and menstruation. You are at a very exciting time in your life – moving from childhood to adulthood.

But this can also be a worrying time because of all the changes taking place in your body and in your mind.

If you understand what is happening to you, then you will be better able to cope with the big changes happening in your body and your emotions.

The guide will:

- help you **UNDERSTAND** what puberty is and how menstruation works
- teach you how to **MANAGE** your periods confidently and with dignity
- teach you about personal **HYGIENE** during your period
- help you feel more **CONFIDENT** about talking about periods

This guide has been produced as part of the Dignity for Girls programme, which works with Christian and Muslim schools in Uganda on menstrual hygiene management. It is funded by UK Aid, from the British people, and the Joffe Charitable Trust.





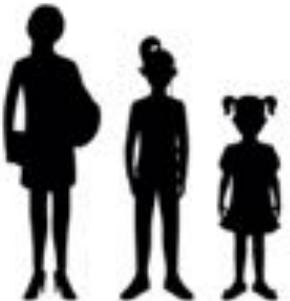
1 WHAT IS PUBERTY?

To understand menstruation, you need to know about puberty. Puberty (also called adolescence) is when girls and boys move from childhood into adulthood. It is a time of **big change**.

Boys and girls experience physical changes in the body at this time and become sexually aware or mature.

Puberty is usually between the age of **8 and 14 in girls**, and the age of **9 and 15 in boys**. Some people start puberty a little earlier or later.

Each person is different so everyone goes through puberty on his or her body's own schedule. This is one reason why some of your friends might still look like kids whereas others look more like adults.



Some of the changes that occur include:

Girls	Boys
Development of breasts	Voices break and deepen
Widening of hips	Shoulders widen, facial hair
Growth of pubic hair	Growth of pubic hair
Spots/acne	Spots/acne
Unexplained mood swings	Unexplained mood changes
Sweat glands become more active	Sweat glands become more active
Girls start menstruation	Boys have involuntary 'wet dreams' (involuntary ejaculations of semen during sleep)

Mood swings

Puberty is a very exciting but it can also be a time of uncertainty, self consciousness and anxiety. As well as changing physically, you are also changing emotionally and psychologically.

This means that sometimes you will very happy one minute, very sad the next minute, and sometimes very angry.

This is **normal!** 



2 WHAT IS MENSTRUATION?

Menstruation is a natural biological change of the body that a girl goes through when she is growing up.

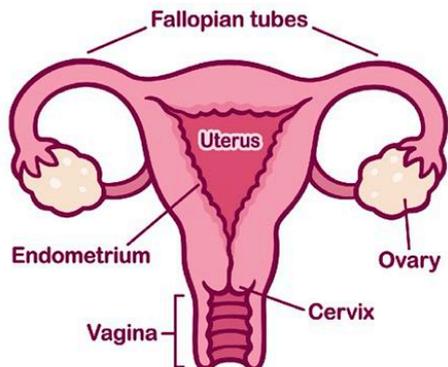
It is the monthly flow of blood from the uterus (womb) through the vagina in all girls every month, and is **normal** and **natural**. This flow of blood is called your period (you might also say your 'menstrual period' or *ensonga*).

How menstruation works

- Every month, an egg is released from the ovary and travels to the uterus (also called the womb). This is **ovulation**.



Female Reproductive System



- The walls of the uterus have already prepared to receive the egg by growing a special lining made of blood and tissue. This lining is called the endometrium.
- The egg spends a few days in the uterus. Then, if it is not fertilised by sperm, the body releases it through the vagina.
- The lining of the uterus breaks down and is also released through the vagina, along with menstrual blood.
- That is **menstruation**.

When do periods start?

- Usually between the ages of **9 and 15 years**.
- Menstruation takes place every month until it stops between the ages of **45 and 55**. This is called **menopause**.

How long do periods last?

- Periods can last for between **3 and 7 days** at a time. The average is 5 days. The amount of blood flow varies and

Menstruation is **NOT**:

- A disease
- Something to be ashamed of
- A reason to stop girls and women from going to school, carrying out household activities, doing sports or working

Menstruation **IS**:

- A normal, healthy part of growing up for girls.
- Something that is experienced by ALL women and girls.
- A natural process whereby a girl's body sheds the lining of the uterus every month, causing blood to flow from the vagina.



sometimes is heavier than at others. The total amount lost is no more than a few teaspoons during one period.

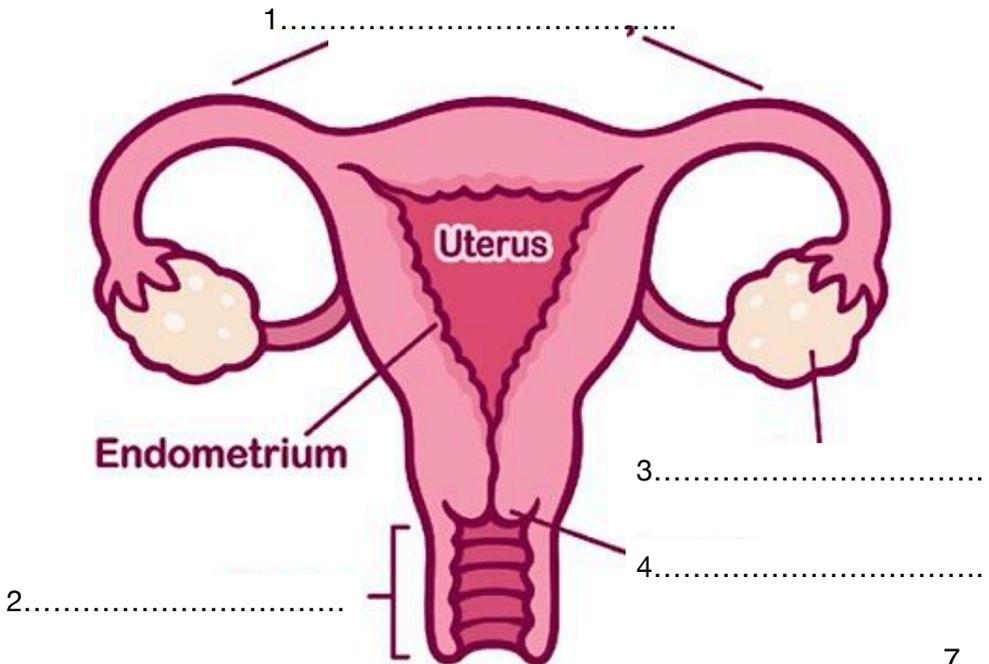
Female reproductive system

Menstruation is part of the female reproductive system. Can you identify the different parts of the female reproductive system?

There are four names missing from the diagram below. See if you can write the names in the correct place.

Ovary
Vagina

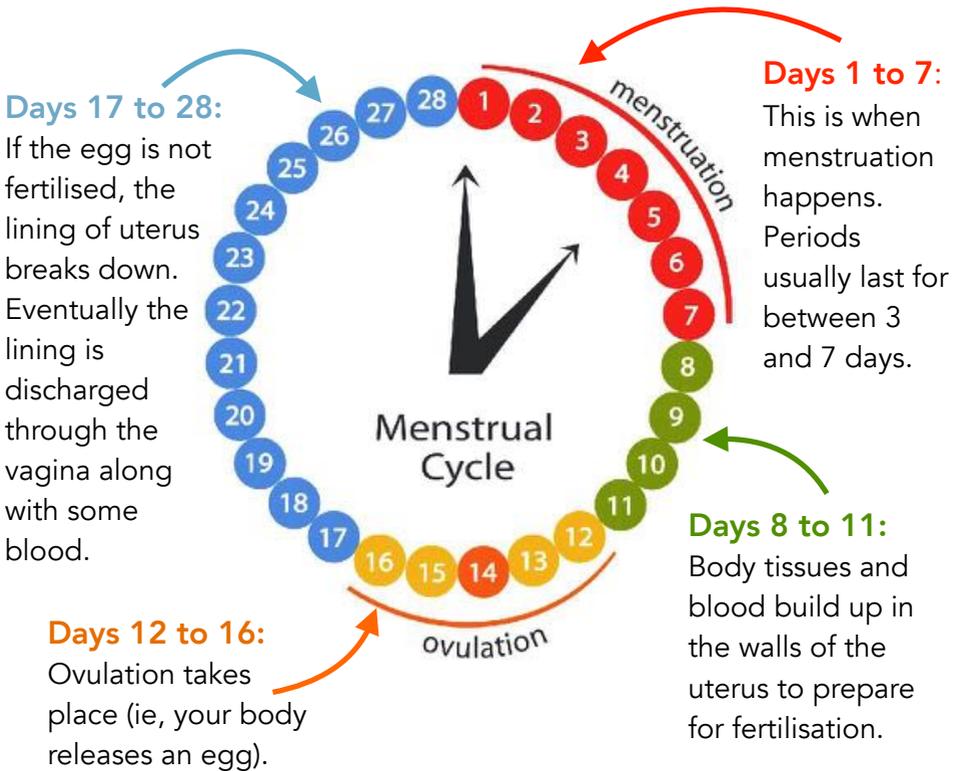
Fallopian tubes
Cervix



3 THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE

The **menstrual cycle** is the length of time between one period and the next. This is usually around **28 days** but sometimes a bit longer or shorter – every girl is unique!

The menstrual cycle diagram below begins with the first day of your period (**day 1**).



This cycle happens **every month** and only stops at menopause. You can use this pattern to know when your period will come so that you are prepared.

When you first start your periods, it takes time for your body to adjust to all the changes. So your periods may not come at the same time each month for the first one or two years.

Don't worry, they will settle down over time.

OTHER TIPS

- **Be prepared:** Take an extra cloth/sanitary pad in a plastic bag to school so that you are prepared.
- **Ask for help:** If you get a bloodstain on your clothes, tie a cloth or sweater around your waist and ask a friend or teacher to help.
- **Carry out normal activities** during your period. You can do anything: go to school, play sports, meet your friends, help with housework.
- **Exercise:** Stay active, exercise is healthy.
- **Eat a healthy diet:** Drink plenty of water and eat plenty of fruit and vegetables. Bananas, citrus foods and avocados might help prevent cramps because they increase potassium levels. Foods rich in iron make new blood so eat beans and green leafy vegetables such as spinach.

PERIOD PROBLEMS

Painful menstruation

- Some girls have back pain, sore breasts, stomach ache or headaches during their period. Others feel tired, or low in spirits, or develop pimples or bloating in their abdomen.
- The pain/discomfort is usually caused by the muscles of the uterus cramping to shed the uterus lining.
- Take simple painkillers for the pain.
- A hot water bottle can also help. This is a rubber bottle that you fill with hot water and hold against your stomach. Wrap it in a cloth if it is too hot.



Health issues

- After puberty some girls see a white or yellowish vaginal discharge in their pants. This is **normal** and nothing to worry about. This is a fluid or mucus that keeps the vagina clean and moist, and protects it from infection.
- However, if your vaginal discharge is itchy, irritating, discoloured or smells bad, this may be a sign of infection. See a doctor or nurse.
- Also see a doctor if you get pain when urinating, or you have more discharge than usual, or you get a lot more menstrual bleeding than usual.
- Using dirty cloths can introduce bacteria to your private parts. This can lead to infections. Wash your reusable pads or cloths.
- Avoid using old, rough, damp cloth, or not changing sanitary pads often enough. This can cause skin irritation.

4 TRUTH AND MYTHS

There are lots of myths about periods. Some of the statements below are true, some are false. Tick ✓ the correct answer.

	STATEMENT	TRUE	FALSE
1	Big girls are the only ones who menstruate.		
2	You can get pregnant if you have sex during your period.		
3	Men with AIDS are cured if they have sex with young girls.		
4	Getting your first period means you are ready for marriage.		
5	Sex cures painful menstruation.		
6	Girls can take part in exercise or sport during their period.		
7	If you go into the garden or climb a tree during your period, crops or fruit will die.		
8	If girls and boys do not have sex when still young, their private parts will block up		
9	If your menstrual cloth is burned, you will become barren.		
10	Used menstrual cloths will attract evil spirits.		

(Answers at the back of this booklet.)

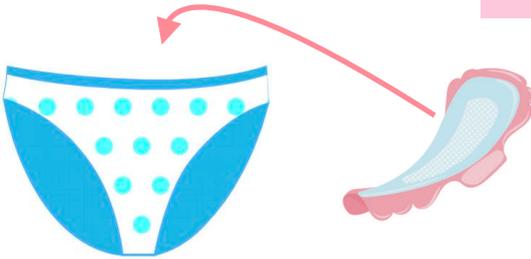
5 MANAGING MENSTRUATION

Periods are a normal part of every girl's life. So you need to learn to manage your menstruation for good health as well as dignity.

- **Don't be afraid of having your period:** it is completely normal and means you are healthy.
- **Remember** that all girls go through this; it is nothing to be ashamed of.
- **Tell a parent/guardian** when your period arrives so they can help you.

Managing blood flow

- Use clean cloths or sanitary pads to absorb your blood.
- The pad goes your pants, like this.



Types of sanitary pad

- Change your cloth or pad every few hours for normal flow, more often for heavy flow. Flow means the amount of blood.
- Wash your hands with soap afterwards.



- Check your pad regularly to see if it needs changing.



DISPOSABLE PADS

- Disposable pads are worn once, then thrown away.
- Some have wrap-around 'wings' to wrap under your panties to keep the pad from moving.
- Others have sticky strips that help the pad stick to your pants. Pull off the cover on top of the sticky strip and press the pad in your pants.



REUSABLE PADS

- Reusable pads are washed after use, dried properly, then used again.
- If you care for them, reusable pads will last for at least one year and even up to three years.
- Some people make their own reusable pads.

Looking after reusable pads

- It is very important to keep reusable pads clean to prevent infections.
- Wash your pads every time you use them.
- Also wash your pants, especially if they are soiled.



Throwing pads away

- Never throw pads down the latrine or toilet – this causes blockages.
- Put them in the bin or incinerator for burning or wrap them in newspaper and burn them at home.

Washing your reusable pads



- Soak the pad in cold water for **20-30** minutes.
- Wash the pad using clean water and soap.
- Always dry your pads in the sun on the line. (If you are embarrassed, you can always put them under another cloth or T shirt.)
- Avoid drying pads on the grass in case of insect infestation.



Personal hygiene

- It is very important to stay healthy and hygienic during your period.
- Wash your private parts with soap and water every day to reduce smells and infections.



7 WHAT DOES MY FAITH SAY?

Both the Christian and Muslim faiths believe menstruation is a normal, bodily function created by God. Both faiths also both teach us that God created everything on Earth.

If God created everything, this also includes menstruation.

Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.

– John 1:3

It is He who created for you all that is in the Earth.'

– Surah al Baquarah 29

The Bible and the Qur'an also tell us that what God created was 'very good' and 'perfect':

God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.

– Genesis 1:31

Allah 'perfected everything which He created'

– Surah As-Sajdah 32:7

DISCUSSION

How should these teachings affect our attitude to menstruation? Is it right to feel ashamed of it? Are other people right to tease and shame girls who are menstruating?

What do you think? Discuss with a friend.

Word search

Hidden in this table are seven words associated with faith values. See if you can find them. The words can go across, down or diagonally. We have found one word: VALUE. See if you can find the words below (answers at the back of this booklet.)

LOVE CARE SHARING DIGNITY RESPECT SUPPORTING

FAITH VALUES WORD SEARCH										
A	E	R	D	G	N	A	S	L	E	C
C	N	D	G	I	K	X	H	T	R	A
A	Q	I	A	T	G	T	A	D	A	R
V	A	L	U	E	P	N	R	E	Z	E
A	W	S	H	A	R	I	I	B	O	C
P	L	H	O	I	A	Z	N	T	L	L
C	V	O	C	A	R	H	G	T	Y	O
A	I	T	V	L	E	P	E	C	T	V
L	E	S	M	E	S	S	O	E	Y	E
C	S	U	P	P	O	R	T	I	N	G
A	S	A	V	U	H	A	M	S	Y	P
R	E	S	P	E	C	T	D	I	A	R

8 RESPONSIBILITIES OF GROWING UP

Menstruation is a beautiful stage in life, the gateway to adulthood. However, every good thing comes with responsibility.

When you start your periods, it is a sign that you can become pregnant. So you need to learn how to care for yourself so that you can grow up happy and healthy.

Protecting yourself

- Look after yourself. Do not allow anyone to disrespect you.
- Treat your body with respect and dignity.
- Protect yourself from people who want you to behave differently.
- Some men or boys may imagine that you are ready for sex or marriage. And you also might experience new feelings of interest in a man or boy.
- Under the law a child (boy or girl) under 18 cannot consent to sex – they are too young to make such an important decision.
- Take care and avoid risky situations.
- Having sex may lead to unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and even HIV and AIDS.
- Having sex may also lead to sexually transmitted diseases that cause infertility or serious health complications.

You are precious

- Remember, you are precious as a girl! Both Christianity and Islam teach that you are precious in the eyes of God!
- Consult your teachers, parents and other trusted people in your community to help you mature responsibly.



ANSWERS

Truth and myths

	STATEMENT	TRUE	FALSE
1	Big girls are the only ones who menstruate		✓
2	You can get pregnant if you have sex during your period.	✓	
3	Men with AIDS are cured if they have sex with young girls.		✓
4	Getting your first period means you are ready for marriage.		✓
5	Sex cures painful menstruation.		✓
6	Girls can take part in exercise or sport during their period.	✓	
7	If you go into the garden or climb a tree during your period, crops or fruit will die.		✓
8	If girls and boys do not have sex when still young, their private parts will block up		✓
9	If your menstrual cloth is burned, you will become barren.		✓
10	Used menstrual cloths will attract evil spirits.		✓

Word search

FAITH VALUES WORD SEARCH - SOLUTION									
			D			S			C
				I		H			A
					G	A			R
V	A	L	U	E		N	R		E
						I			
	L					N	T		
		O				G		Y	
			V						
				E					
	S	U	P	P	O	R	T	I	N
R	E	S	P	E	C	T			