

# A SUPPORTIVE GUIDE TO PERIODS



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We know going through puberty can feel a bit daunting, but trust us, it's totally normal. And with it come periods. We've put together this booklet to help you along the way, covering exactly what happens to your body when you start getting periods, giving you some tips about what exercise best suits your cycle stage and busting some myths about periods and exercise in general.

*Are you ready? Let's go!*



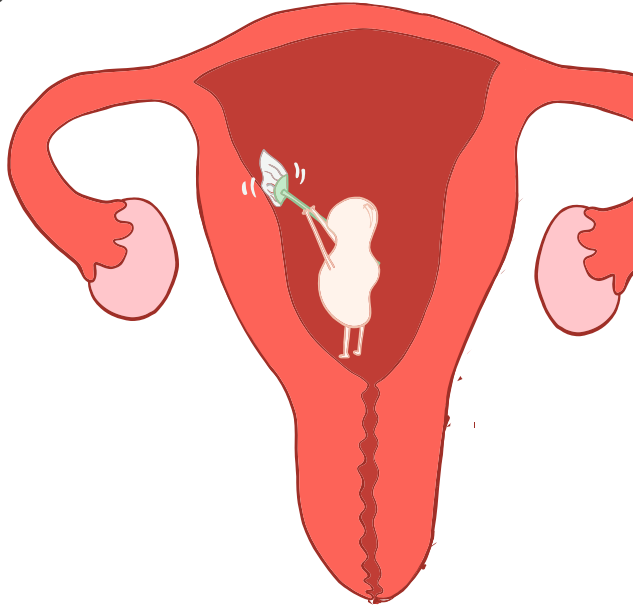


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# DISCHARGE & PERIODS

# WHAT IS DISCHARGE?

You start producing discharge anywhere between a year to a few months before getting your first period. Discharge is (often) a whiteish or translucent slimy liquid that one day appears in your underwear. Does that sound disgusting? Nope, it's actually a really good and natural thing to have discharge. And from now on you'll likely have discharge for the rest of your life, so you have plenty of time to get used to it.



*Your body's own cleaning system!*

Discharge keeps the vagina clean the mucous membranes in the vagina moist and protects you against infections. It's like the body's own cleaning system! Discharge is also the best source of gossip relating to your body. It tells you when you're ovulating, when your period is on the way or if something isn't quite right.

But it can also vary from one day to the next without there being anything at all wrong!

# DISCHARGE CAN SMELL A BIT SOUR, LIKE GONE OFF MILK.

Sometimes the normal balance of the vagina can be disturbed, and then you'll notice it in your discharge. Keep an eye on it if it starts to smell bad, yeasty or sweet. Or if the discharge begins to change colour and become greenish, yellow, grey or look grainy with little clumps.

These are signs that something's not quite right. For example, this could be a fungal infection, a sexually-transmitted disease (if you're old enough to be sexually active) or bacterial vaginosis.

It may be nothing, but it's important to contact your school nurse, GP or speak to a parent if you notice anything a bit different.

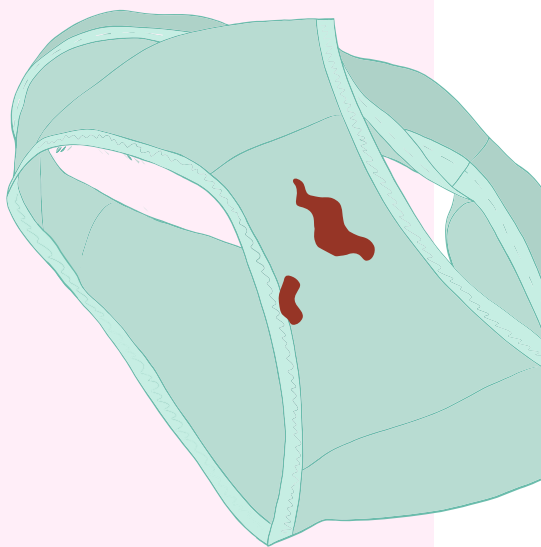
# HERE IT COMES – I'VE GOT MY PERIOD

You'll often start your periods (also called menstruation) when you're between 11 and 14. But they CAN start as early as 9 or as late as 16. Your period will rarely be very heavy the first few times. It will probably just be a stain on your underwear, and it can be anything from red to brown or almost black. Now your periods have begun, and for the next few years they probably won't be very regular. Several months may pass between the first two periods, and they can last for anything from 1 to 10 days.

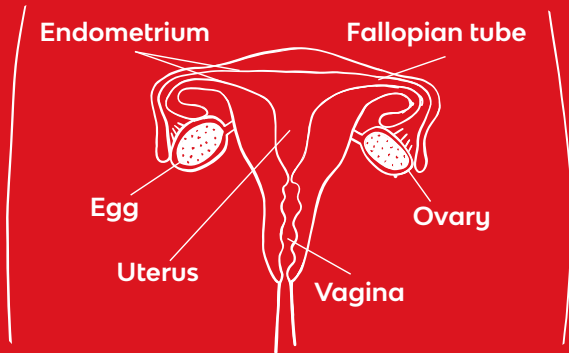
## Why do I have periods?

Periods are part of the menstrual cycle which is a natural physiological process which most biologically female individuals will go through.

Periods are actually a body's sign that you're ready to become pregnant. But don't worry! It doesn't mean that you will or should become pregnant, only that your body CAN. Your period is part of a monthly menstrual cycle that lasts somewhere between 21 and 35 days. The average is 28 days.



# HOW YOUR PERIOD WORKS:



1. The uterus develops a lining, the endometrium (also called the uterine lining) to prepare to accept a fertilised egg.
2. One of the ovaries releases an egg, which travels down the fallopian tube towards the uterus. This is called ovulation, and takes a few days.
3. An egg that meets a sperm on the way can be fertilised – in which case you become pregnant. Without fertilisation, the body gets rid of the egg, the endometrium and a little blood. And this makes up your period.
4. The bleeding starts about 14 days after ovulation. Most bleeding happens on the first two days, and most people bleed for 3–8 days. Then the cycle begins again.





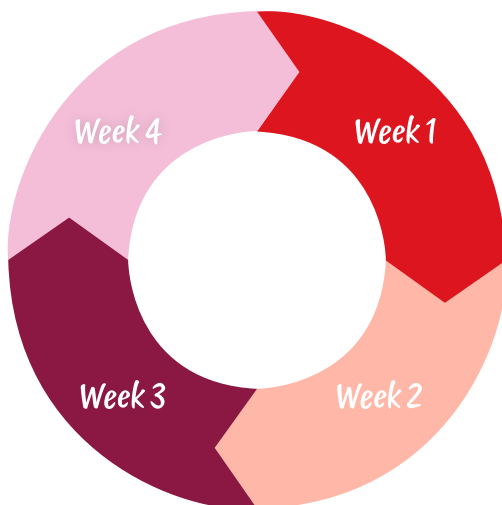
**2**

**ALL ABOUT  
YOUR  
MENSTRUAL  
CYCLE**

# 4 PHASES THAT AFFECT YOUR MOOD

The average menstrual cycle lasts for 28 days, but everything from 21–35 days is normal.

There are loads of hormones in your body, such as oestrogen, testosterone and progesterone. The levels change throughout your cycle, and affect how you feel. They also affect how hungry you are, how much energy you have, your concentration levels and even how strong you are. So it's perfectly normal for all of these things to change throughout your cycle as the hormones come and go.



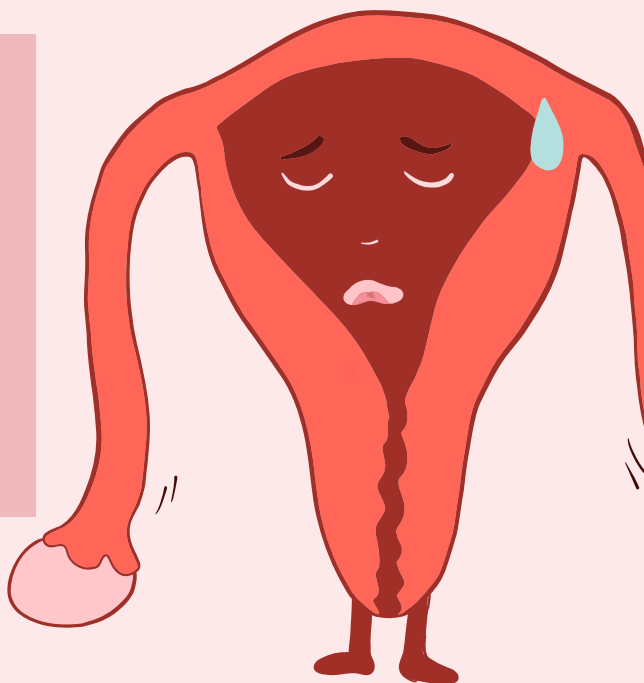
Being active can be a great way to relieve period pain and boost your mood during your cycle, but some movement is better suited to different phases of your cycle. Look out for our suggestions as we talk you through each phase - but remember, everyone's experience with their period is unique, so listen to your body and do what makes you feel good.

# WEEK 1 (day 1-7)

Period week! Your oestrogen is lowest on the first day, so don't be surprised if you have no energy. You might have period pains (also called menstrual cramps) or feel tired, nervous or easily irritated. Your breasts can feel heavy and tender. But you may also not feel anything very much. If so, that's great! During this week, the oestrogen increases, making you sharper and more focused. Which is perfect if you need to get things done!

Listen to your body during this week. Rest if you're tired and eat when you're hungry. If you want to talk about your emotions, you should do so. These may sound like simple things, but they're easy to forget.

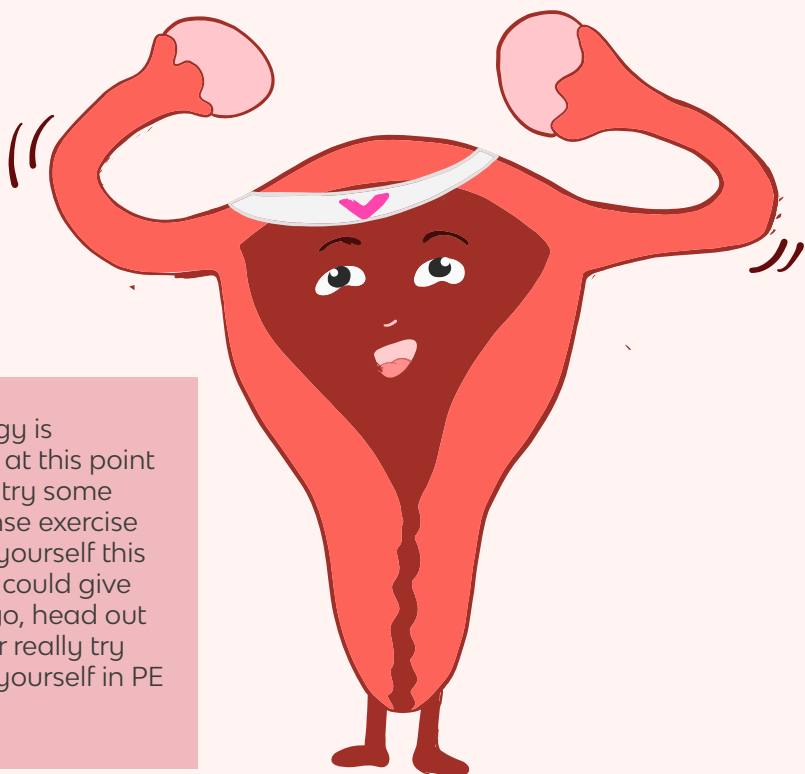
You might be more in the mood to binge-watch your favourite show and eat some snacks than exercise, but keeping active can help. If your energy is a little lower, gentle exercise such as yoga or walking is a great way to keep your body moving in a relaxing way.



# WEEK 2 (day 8–14)

Do you feel positive? You can thank your rising levels of oestrogen and progesterone for their help! When your period is over and these two hormones continue increasing, you may feel full of energy. Things that felt tough in the previous week may now seem much easier. Hoorah!

It might be useful to remember that the hormone boost can also make you anxious. If so, it's nice to surround yourself with people who make you feel good. This can help you feel better.



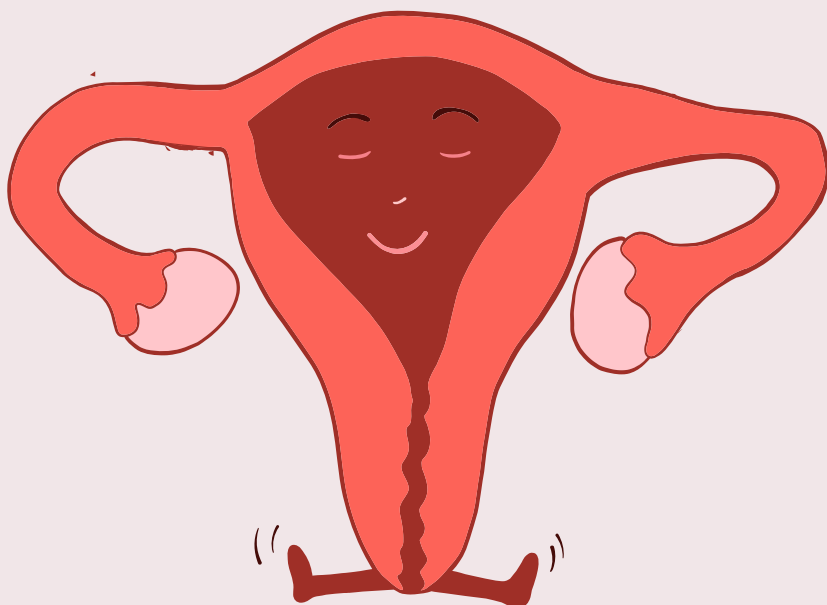
Your energy is increasing at this point so maybe try some more intense exercise and push yourself this week. You could give boxing a go, head out for a run or really try and push yourself in PE class.

# WEEK 3 (day 15–21)

At the start of this week, your oestrogen level falls. And so you might feel a bit uninspired. A rising progesterone level can also mean that you lack energy. But at the end of the week things start to get brighter! That's when your hormone levels rise and flatten out, which often gives a feeling of calmness and well-being. It's nice to feel a bit more balance!

Ovulation is the big event this week, which means the chance of getting pregnant if you have unprotected sex is biggest now.

Those energy levels are still nice and high so it's a great week to get active.



# WEEK 4 (day 22–28)

Some people call this PMS week (PMS = premenstrual syndrome). This week, your hormone levels fall significantly. This may mean you're cross or have big mood swings – and also that you don't sleep so well. But try not to worry. Not everyone feels it so much, and if you do try to remember that you're only human.

Just like everyone else, you have peaks and troughs, and thousands of moods in between. Sometimes it can be nice to just shut out the rest of the world. Take a bath, text a friend, go for a walk or just binge a good show.

Low intensity exercises are best for this phase of your cycle as your hormones are dropping - something like Pilates or swimming might be fun! Or maybe just go on a walk with a friend.



# DISCHARGE HELPS TRACK YOUR CYCLE

Both the appearance and quantity of discharge changes during your menstrual cycle.

If you keep track of how your discharge behaves, you'll quickly learn how it works for your body.



**Ovulation**



**Between ovulation  
and your period**

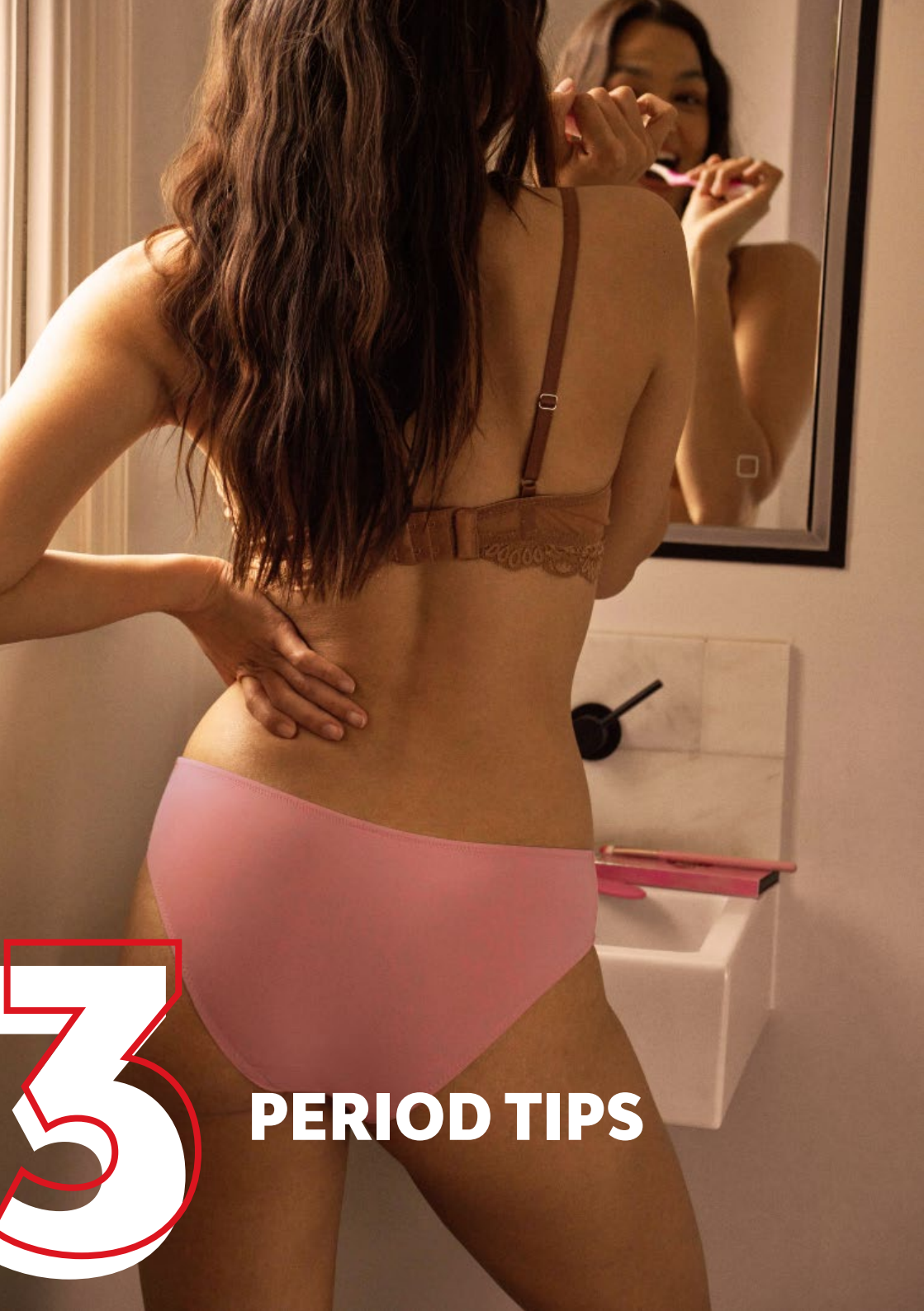


**Before your  
period**



**After your  
period**

During ovulation, you will have more discharge and it will be translucent and slippery. Before your period, your discharge will often be white or whiteish-yellow. And just before your period it can be a bit brownish or light pink. That's because you've already started to bleed and the discharge contains a bit of your period. The same thing applies after your period, when the last bit of your period can make the discharge light brown.



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**PERIOD TIPS**




# Tips for period pains

All bodies are different, and what feels good to one person may not suit someone else at all. But there are a few things that usually feel good to most people.

- ✓ Have a hot bath, hold a warm wheat bag or heated blanket to the place that hurts, or tie a shawl around your hips.
- ✓ Movement can ease the cramps. Dance, go for a walk or do some other exercise you enjoy.
- ✓ Eat and sleep well! If your body is tired or hungry, it finds it more difficult to handle pain.

## *What if nothing works?*

Ask your parents or school nurse about non-prescription painkillers that can help.



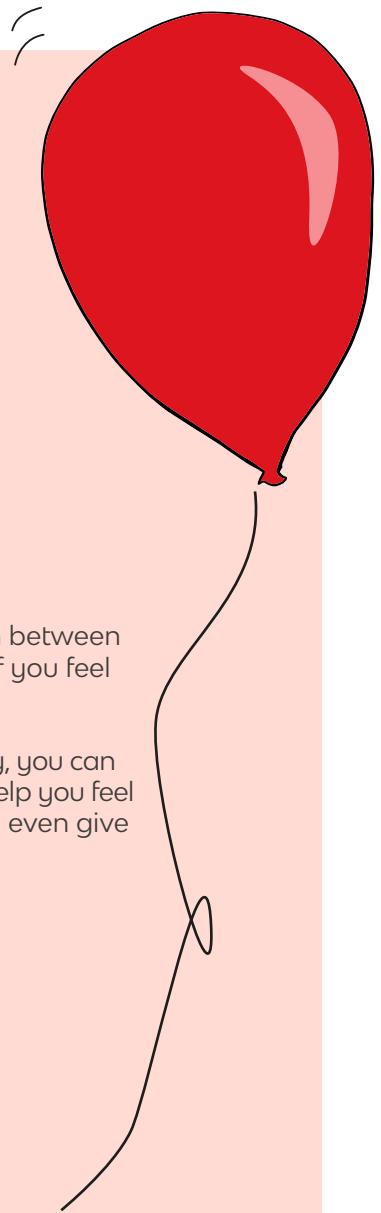
## Is there anything I should avoid when I have my period?

You can often carry on with your normal life when you have your period. The actual bleeding needn't stop you doing anything. But of course you might feel it's hard dealing with pain, a low mood or tiredness and it's perfectly ok!

"I feel  
soooooo  
bloated!"

During your menstrual cycle you can gain between 2 and 4.5 kg in fluid! So it's not surprising if you feel swollen and bloated.

If you want to reduce the fluid in your body, you can try getting active and sweating. This will help you feel less bloated, put you in a better mood and even give you more energy!





## Being active while you have your period is actually really good for several reasons!

Exercise improves the blood circulation in the pelvic area. This may mean you have less period pain. It doesn't need to be an intense workout, but try to carry on with PE lessons, football training, dancing or skateboarding just like normal. Cheer yourself on!

Exercise or physical activity will also make you feel better overall, because it helps the body to produce endorphins. These are the feel-good hormones that can both relieve PMS symptoms and improve your sleep.

So when you're thinking about using your period as an excuse to skip your PE lesson, it might actually be just the thing you need.

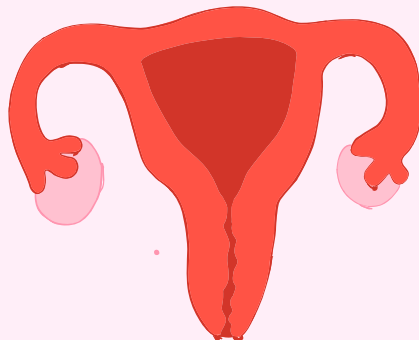
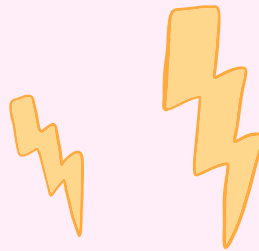


## PMS – Premenstrual syndrome

You may notice emotional or physical changes in the days or weeks before your period. This is called PMS and can lead to symptoms such as bloating, dizziness, tenderness in your breasts and even diarrhoea. You may also feel sad, irritated or tearful. None of this is particularly fun, but it is normal and very common.



Before your period starts, and even during it, you can experience minor cramps in the lower part of your stomach. This is because your uterus is contracting to expel the endometrium. This period pain is completely normal, but if the pain is very severe or prolonged, you should talk to a doctor.





# CAN I SWIM DURING MY PERIOD?



# NO PROBLEM!

There's no reason not to swim during your period. If you're in the sea or a lake, you can just swim without worrying about protection. If you're bleeding a lot and are worried about your swimming gear, you can use a tampon or menstrual cup.

For hygiene reasons, it's also good to use protection if you're bleeding a lot and are swimming in a pool. But if it's right at the end of your period and you're not bleeding much you can actually swim without period protection here too.





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**WHAT  
PROTECTION  
SHOULD I  
CHOOSE?**



# FIND YOUR THING!

You know what? You can choose exactly what suits you best! When you start getting periods, you can try things out and see what you think works for you. Maybe you'll want to use different types of protection for different occasions.

So let's look at the most common options you can buy in the shops. And, of course, how they work! At [bodyform.co.uk](http://bodyform.co.uk), you can also find loads more information about each type of menstrual protection.

# PANTY LINERS

As we've already said, discharge is your genitals' best friend, and something you should take notice of. But even your bestie sometimes gets a bit annoying. If you don't like it when your underwear gets sticky, panty liners are a good choice. You can also use them for light periods. Panty liners are super-thin, absorb liquid quickly and let your skin breathe. And nobody can tell you're using them.

## EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT PANTY LINERS



# PADS

Most people who get periods start off with pads (sometimes called sanitary towels), which are also the most common menstrual protection in the UK. You unfold the pad and attach it to your underwear using the sticky strip on the back. Some pads have wings, which you fold around the edge of your underwear. This can be useful when your period is a bit heavier. On the packet it will say whether the pad is intended for a heavy or light flow.



# OVERNIGHT PADS

In the daytime, you're usually sitting, standing or walking and then the blood runs straight down into the pad. But at night you lie down and change between sleeping positions. And then the blood might run differently. So overnight pads are longer at the front and the back. They're also a bit thicker, so you can sleep well without having to get up and change your pad.



# PERIOD PANTS

Period pants have thicker material in the gusset that absorbs the blood like a pad, but feel just as comfortable to wear as normal pants. You can wear them for up to 12 hours and be certain they'll catch everything that comes out. And they're reusable - you just rinse them off in cold water then wash them as usual and they're ready to use, over and over again. Making period pants a great choice for the environment. Here too there are many different models, sizes and colours to choose from.



# TAMPONS

With a tampon, you insert it into the vagina where it absorbs the blood. The tampon packet contains a description of how to insert it. There are different sizes for different amounts of flow. Start with a mini-tampon and see if it suits you. When the tampon is in place, it shouldn't feel uncomfortable.

*The tampon size is about the amount of flow you have, not the size of your vagina.*



# MENSTRUAL CUP

You also insert a menstrual cup into your vagina, but it collects the blood instead of absorbing it. When the cup is full (after a maximum of 12 hours), you empty it and insert it again. How often you need to empty it will depend on how heavy your flow is. Here, too, there are different sizes to choose between. A cup can last for several years, and just like period pants it's a good choice for the environment.





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