

# Menstrual Hygiene Management

**the  
pad  
project.**

**Your period.  
Your health.  
Your world.**

# Before we begin:

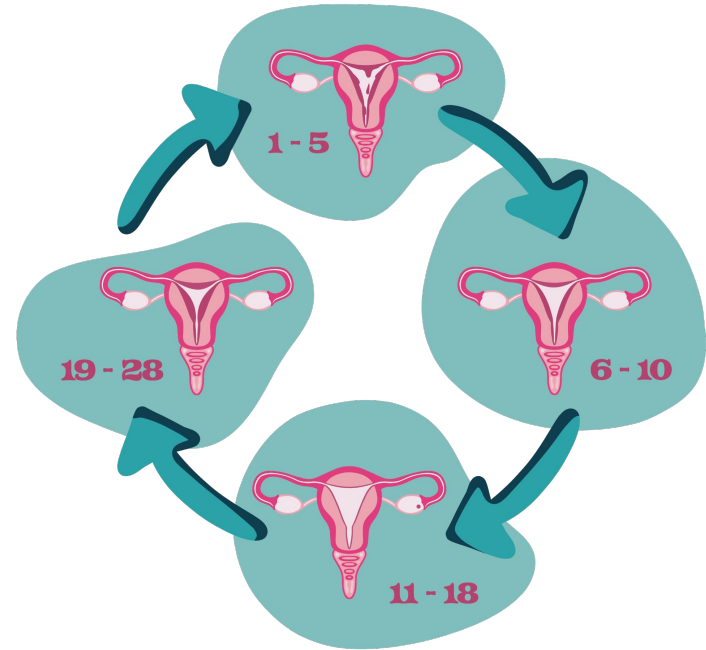
As we learn, you may feel shy, curious, excited, giddy, concerned, or anything else! It's all okay.

Remember to write down any questions that you want to ask in private.

# What is happening in my body?

The menstrual cycle:

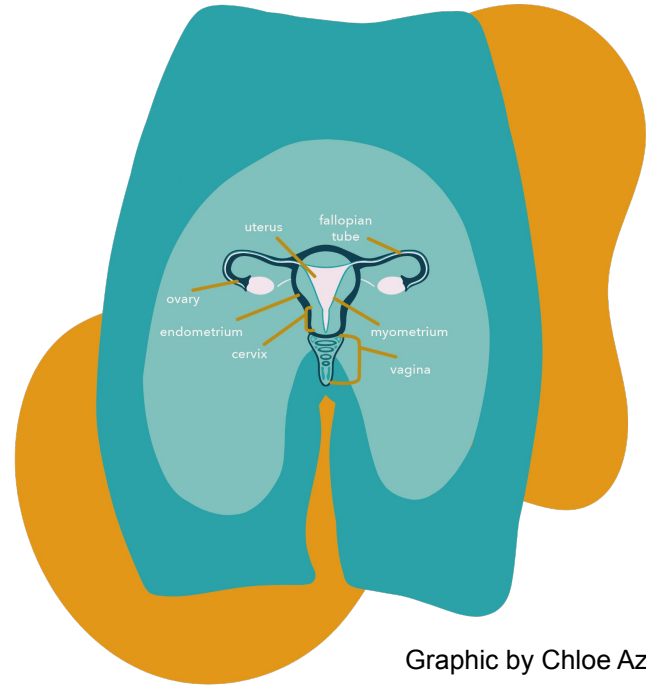
- A process, controlled by hormones
- An egg develops in your ovary
- Your ovary releases the egg
- The lining of your uterus grows to prepare for a fertilized egg to implant
- If pregnancy does not occur, the lining sheds accompanied by bleeding, and your cycle starts again



Graphic by Chloe Azorsky

# What is happening in my body?

- Your menstruation or period is one part of a bigger cycle
- 'Period' is a slang that is used just like other words used in different cultures
- 'Period' also refers to the cyclical/periodic nature of the phenomenon
- Example: a butterfly's life cycle
  - egg to larva to pupa to adult butterfly

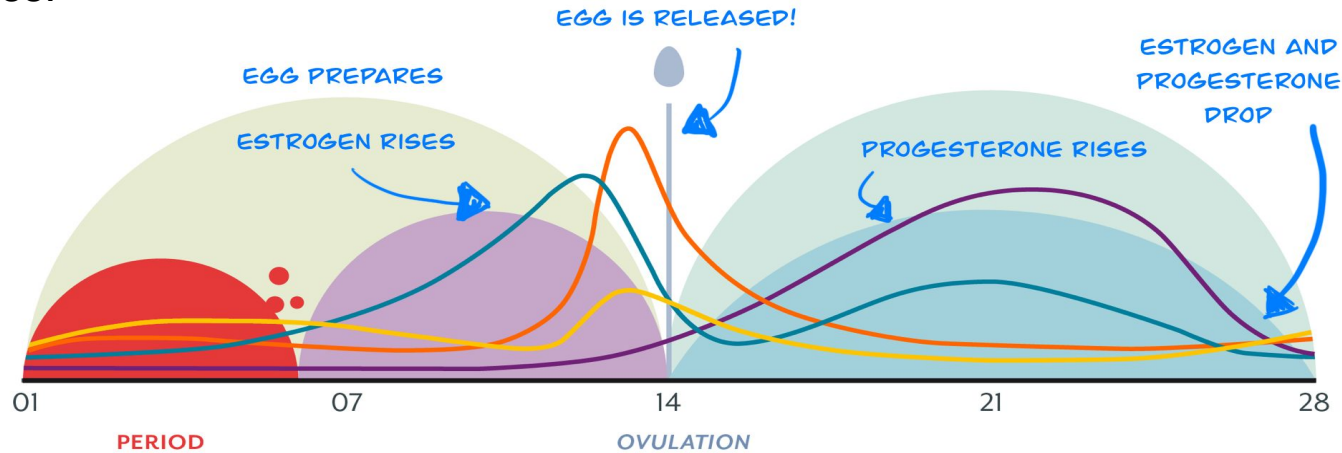


Graphic by Chloe Azorsky

# What makes these changes happen?

Hormones are **chemical messengers that are secreted directly into the blood**, which carries them to organs and tissues of the body to exert their functions.

There are many types of hormones that act on different aspects of bodily functions and processes.\*



# Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) is normal!

- Once you begin to menstruate regularly, you may notice some patterns in how you feel right before your period
  - Your breasts are swollen or more tender than usual
  - You may also feel cramps in your lower abdomen or back
  - You may feel tired, irritated, or sad in the days leading up to your period
- If you feel extra edgy, try to treat yourself to some quiet time alone
- PMS is caused by hormones
  - chemicals that are released in your body prior to your period
- PMS symptoms can be related to vitamin deficiency
  - Try adding more Calcium, Magnesium, or B6 to your diet
- PMS is perfectly normal!

# Hormones can cause other changes too:

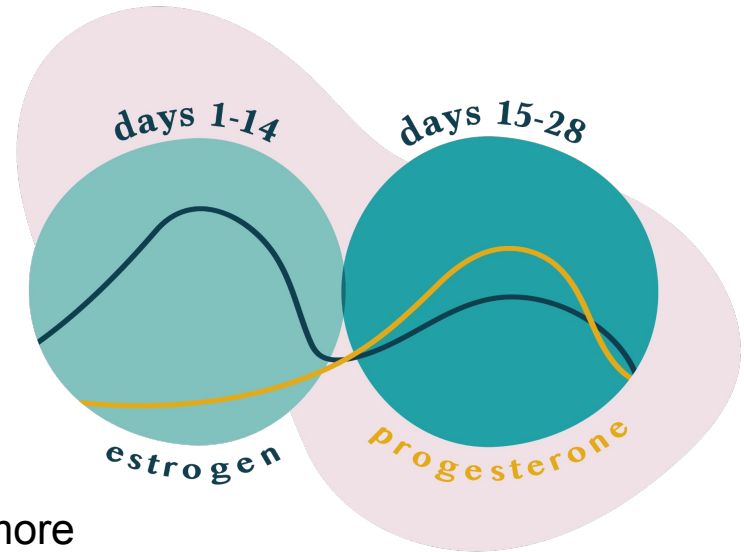
Changes in your:

- Vaginal fluid (seen in your underwear)
- Energy level (high, low)
- Skin (hydrated, oily, dry, breakouts)

Estrogen is responsible for:

- growth of breasts
- development of pubic + armpit hair
- regulation of internal reproductive organs + more

After ovulation, progesterone prepares the body for a potential pregnancy



Graphic by Chloe Azorsky

# Everyone's body is different:

"I feel cuddly at the end of my cycle. Like I have a deeper emotional connection with myself. I also really love eating more food at that time"

- Nanouk

"I feel the most changes in the middle of my cycle. I usually feel more excited or sometimes anxious."

- Jess

"The cramps I get in my back and abdomen are so annoying. They hurt, and I get tired and just want to lie down, and I like to be alone."

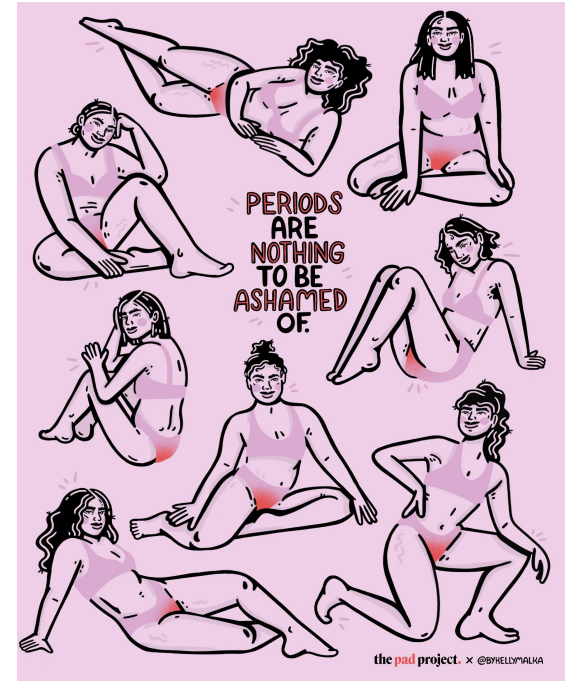
- Binsa

"Getting my period is really hard for me because I identify as a boy. And I don't want my body to change."

- Sam

"I don't really notice too much. I notice my mood changes mostly when I don't get enough sleep, but not from my cycle."

- Alina

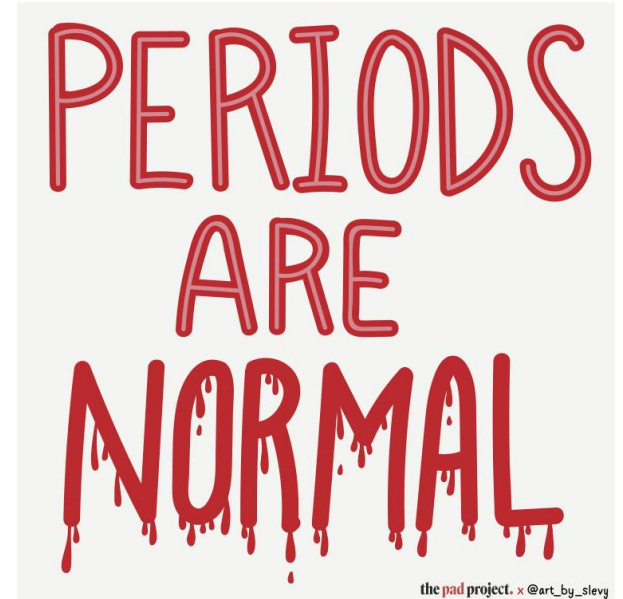




# Reflection Exercise:

In your group, take turns sharing:

- Body mapping
- What was it like for you to get your first period?
  - Were you scared? Excited?
  - Did you have support?
- How do you experience your cycle now?
  - Do you notice positive and/or negative changes or no changes at all?
  - Do you think your expectations of what you will experience affect what you notice?

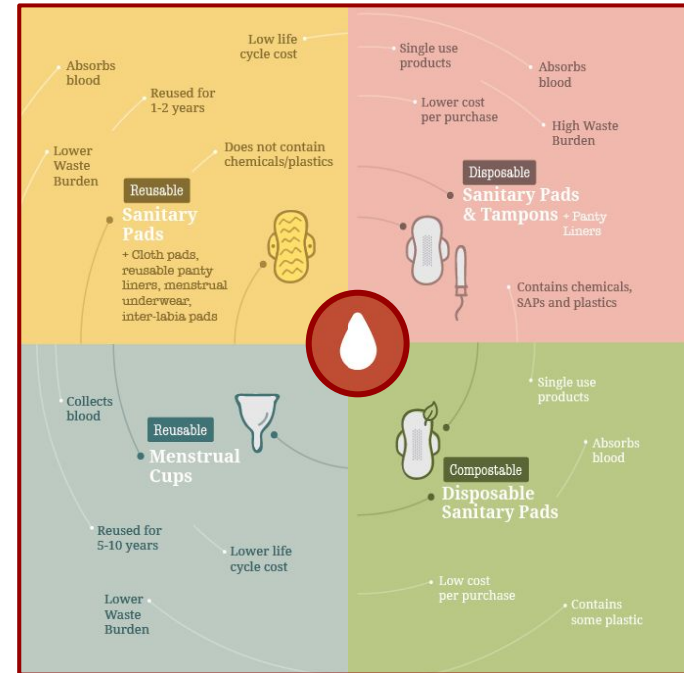


# Your period, your choice!

Managing your period

# How to manage my period hygienically?

- Washable period underwear
  - Absorbent
  - Reusable
  - External use
- Washable pad
  - Absorbent
  - Reusable
  - External use
- Disposable pad
  - Absorbent
  - Widely available
  - External use
- Tampon
  - Absorbent
  - Disposable
  - Widely available
  - Vaginal insertion
- Menstrual cup
  - Collector
  - Reusable
  - Vaginal insertion

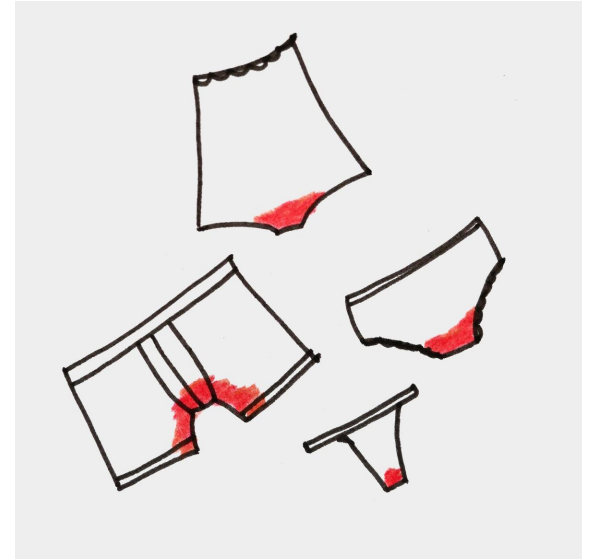


# Tips for managing your period:

- Use whatever products you are most comfortable with
- Wear period underwear or a pad when you think your period may start
- Change your collection tool more often on heavy days
- Change your pad or tampon every 4-6 hours
- Come prepared
  - Carry extra pads/tampons
- Wear darker clothing on period days if you are worried about stains
- Keep your products in a clean and dry place when you are not using them
- Do not douche your vagina
  - it can cause infections
- Do not flush used pads/tampons down the toilet
  - Always place them in the trash

# Leaks happen!

- It's normal to have a leak from time to time
- Tips for leaks:
  - Change your product
  - Ask a trusted person for help if needed
  - Keep a change of pants closeby
    - Or borrow them from a friend
  - Tie your sweater around your waist
  - Use cold water to remove blood stains
- Organize menstruation awareness sessions at schools



# How do I manage pain?

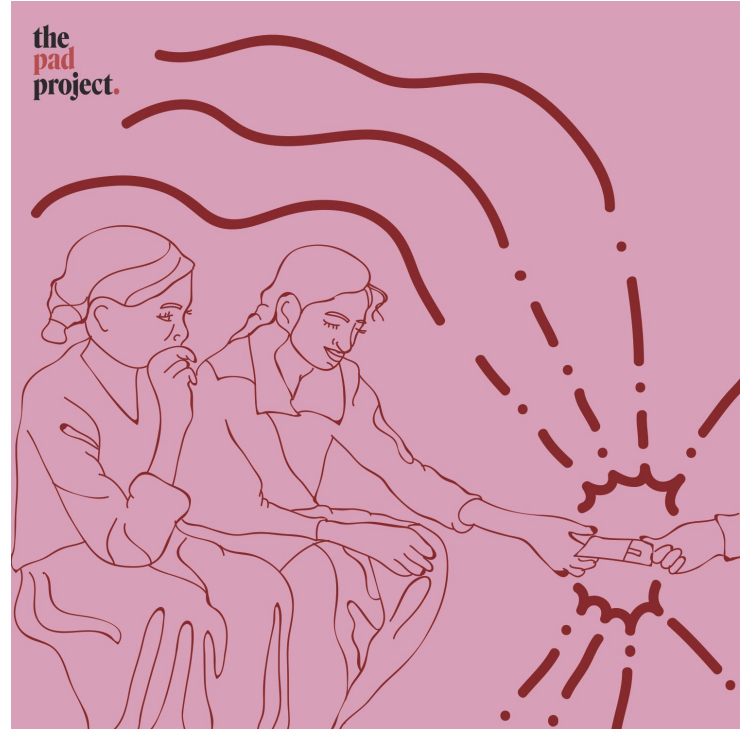
- Over-the-counter anti-inflammatory pain medication
- A heating pad, hot water bottle, or warm bath
- Cramps: ginger capsules, magnesium supplements, reducing a high fat diet, limiting stress, and not smoking
- Exercise: yoga that stretches and compresses your abdomen can help pain
- Listen to your body + eat your favorite foods
  - Avoid fatty/salty food, alcohol, + carbonated drinks
  - Rest or hang out with a close friend
- Talk to your doctor if your symptoms are getting in the way of your life



Graphic by Chloe Azorsky

# Brainstorm:

- What do you like and or dislike about managing your period?
- What works for you?



Graphic by @art\_by\_slevy

# Your period, your health!

How to know what's "normal"

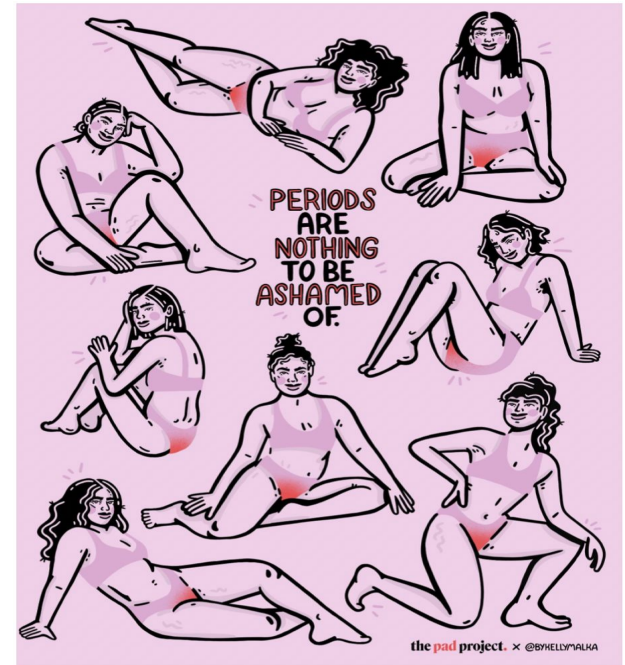


Having a period is like getting a regular health report.

It helps you know what's going on in your body.

# What is “normal”?

- Age of menarche
  - 10-16 years
- Menstrual cycle length
  - 21-40 day cycle
  - Menstrual blood flow for 2-7 days
- How to identify heavy menstrual blood loss for seeking healthcare advice
  - Soaking a pad or tampon in 1-2 hours for more than 2-4 hours
  - especially if associated with dizziness



# 1: When should I talk to a doctor?

- No period by age 17
- No period for more than 90 days
- A cycle that often falls outside 21-40 days long
  - or 21-45 days long if you've had your period for less than 2 years
- Period lasts more than 8 days/is very heavy
- How to identify heavy menstrual blood loss for seeking healthcare advice:
  - Soaking a pad or tampon in 1-2 hours for more than 2-4 hours, especially if associated with dizziness



Graphic by Chloe Azorsky

## 2: When should I talk to a doctor?

- Any symptom that's getting in the way of your life
- Excess facial/body hair or thinning hair on head
- Conditions like PCOS, endometriosis, and more may cause menstrual irregularities
  - Symptoms like excessive bleeding/pain, irregular bleeding/spotting, acne, hirsutism, weight gain etc.\*
- PMDD: premenstrual dysphoric disorder
  - Form of PMS that can cause extreme and additional symptoms
  - Negatively affects your quality of life\*



Graphic by Chloe Azorsky

# What can affect my cycle?

- Stress
- Not eating enough
- High intensity exercise and workouts without enough calories
- Weight gain or weight loss
- Long-distance travel (across time zones)
- Certain health conditions like PCOS, PMDD, and endometriosis
- Use of hormonal contraceptives like pills, IUDs, injectables, implants etc.



Graphic by Chloe Azorsky

# How to track your cycle:

Take note of:

- The first day of bleeding
- How long your cycle lasts one period to the next
- Anything unusual to ask your doctor about
- Free apps are available to help conveniently track periods



Graphic by Chloe Azorsky

Periods.  
Society.  
Taboos.

# taboo:

A subject, word, or action that is avoided for religious or social reasons.



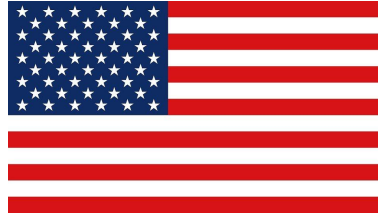
# Taboos around the world:



## China

**Myth:** Tampons can take away your virginity.

**Impact:** Girls don't use tampons when they could benefit from them. Girls who use tampons feel shame.



## USA

**Myth:** Menstruating women are “impure.”

**Impact:** In some religious groups, a women cannot touch any man while menstruating, including their husband.



## Mexico

**Myth:** Menstruation is embarrassing or funny.

**Impact:** Girls hide their products, and can be scared they will be laughed at if someone sees their tampon.

# Taboos around the world:



## Kyrgyzstan

**Myth:** Women are dirty during their period.

**Impact:** Women are not allowed into mosques during their periods.



## Nepal

**Myth:** Impurity

**Impact:** Untouchable and isolated during menstruation. Not allowed to cook, enter the kitchen, go to temple, or participate in festivals.



## India

**Myth:** Women are dirty during their period.

**Impact:** Women are isolated during menstruation. Women in some parts of India spend five days in a gaokor – a hut outside the village where girls and women are banished during menstruation.

# More Taboos:

**Taboo:** People are dirty when they have their periods

**Truth:** Just like saliva, periods are a natural and normal part of being human

**Taboo:** Periods are “unnatural”

**Truth:** Nearly half the people on the planet get a period.

- Millions of people have their period right now. Periods are necessary for life.

**Taboo:** Periods are gross

**Truth:** Periods are a healthy part of the body, just like your digestion or your heart pumping blood.

# Why are menstrual taboos harmful?

- Can make menstruators feel bad or ashamed
- Prevent us from talking about periods openly.
- Silence can lead to suffering
  - cramps and period problems go unaddressed
- They shape our schools, workplaces, and social experiences
- They limit access to pads, private bathrooms, and places to dispose of pads



# Period Glossary:

- **Period poverty**: the lack of access to sanitary products, menstrual hygiene education, toilets, hand washing facilities, and/or waste management
- **Menstrual Hygiene Management**: using a clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect blood that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of the period; using soap and water for washing the body as required; having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual products
- **Tampon tax(Menstrual tax)**: a term used for the sales tax imposed on menstrual hygiene products by a government; these products are not subject to a unique or special tax but are classified as luxury items along with other goods that are not exempted
- **Menstrual Equity**: “In order to have a fully equitable and participatory society, we must have laws and policies that ensure menstrual products are safe and affordable and available for those who need them.” (Jennifer Weiss-Wolf)

# The Menstrual Tax

Menstrual products are currently taxed in 28 states, while other basic necessities like groceries and medical supplies are not.

# According to Tax Free Period:

- Colorado has a menstrual tax, but private jet parts are untaxed
- Georgia has a menstrual tax, but tattoos are untaxed
- Idaho has a menstrual tax, but hair loss treatment is untaxed
- South Carolina has a menstrual tax, but amusement park rides are untaxed

**Remember, you can advocate for  
tax-free menstruation in your state!**

# Legislation:

- As of 2020, 22 states in the United States are tax free!
- Based on the CARES Act of 2020, menstrual products are now covered by HSAs (health savings accounts) and FSAs (flexible spending accounts)
- Menstrual products are NOT covered by SNAP or WIC





# Further Research:

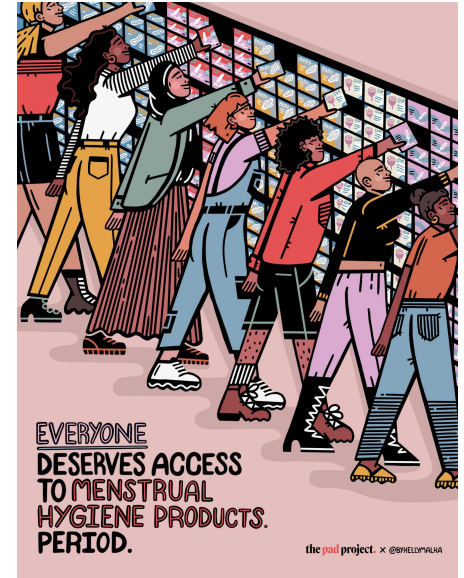
- Does your state tax menstrual products?
- Does your state have dedicated policies for menstrual health education and access to products?
- Are toilets and/or changing rooms available to manage menstrual hygiene in institutions?
- Are public middle and high schools in your state required to provide free period products to students?
  - What about colleges and universities in your state?
- Is the lack of menstrual education leading to poor reproductive health outcomes (teen pregnancies, access to contraception, etc.) in your state?

# Menstrual Equity

Author + menstrual equity activist Jennifer Weiss-Wolf says:  
“In order to have a fully equitable and participatory society, we must have laws and policies that ensure menstrual products are safe and affordable and available for those who need them.”

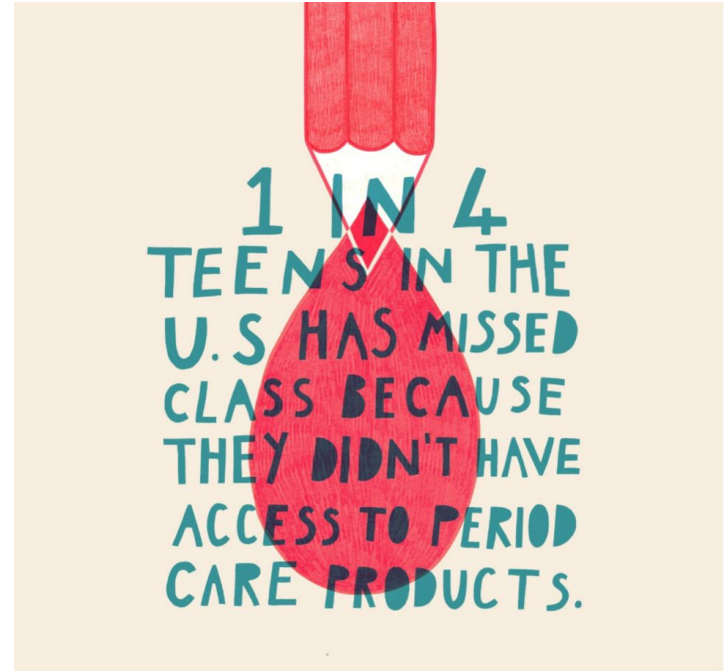
# Menstrual Data:

- Globally, 3.9 billion people menstruate during their lives
- Over 500 million menstruators (almost 25% of all menstruators) experience period poverty (Days for Girls)
- Menstruators spend about \$13.25 per month on period products
  - ~\$6,360 over a lifetime (The Philadelphia Inquirer)
- 61% U.S. teens have worn a pad/tampon for 4+ hours because they lacked product access (State of the Period)
- 76% U.S. teens think school teaches them more about frog biology than human female biology (State of the Period)



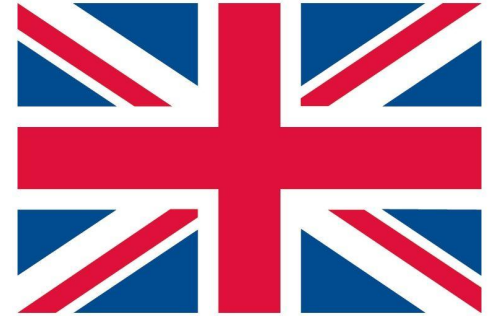
# Period Poverty in the United States:

- From a study by Thinx and PERIOD
- 1 in 4 students in the U.S. has missed class because they didn't have access to menstrual products
- 1 in 5 teens has struggled to afford menstrual products
- From the National Women's Law Center
- In 2019, almost 1 in 9 women lived in poverty



# Period Poverty in the United Kingdom:

- 1 in 10 girls in the UK is unable to afford period products (Days for Girls)
- Menstruators in the U.K. spend up to 18,450 euros (\$20,744 USD) on period-related expenses in their lifetime (Borgen Project)
- About 49% of teens have missed a day of school because of their periods (Borgen Project)
- Menstruators sometimes improvise sanitary products to use during their period, like wrapping a sock around their underwear (Borgen Project)



# Period Poverty in Kyrgyzstan:

- In Kyrgyzstan, 25.5% of schools lack access to clean drinking water (24 KG)
- 75% of schools lack toilets (24 KG)
- 12% of menstruators ages 15-19 did not participate in social activities or school/work because of their period (MCIS)
- Many menstruators did not know about periods until menarche (UNICEF)



# Brainstorm:

- What would the world look like if everyone knew periods were healthy and normal?
- How would it feel different?



Graphic by Chloe Azorsky

# Reflection Exercise: Myth vs. Fact

- Break up into your groups
- Divide a piece of paper down the middle
- Red marker:
  - myths related to menstruation
- Black marker:
  - facts related to menstruation
- Example:
  - “Periods are” / “It is possible to do any job, just as well, while menstruating”



## Reflection Art:

- Normalization of Periods
- Draw your menstruation process
- What colors do you see?
- What do you feel?



Graphic by Chloe Azorsky

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**THANK  
YOU**

**the *pad* project.**



# this toolkit was created with contributions from:

- **Sorelle Cohen:** *The Pad Project*
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