Menstrual Hygiene Management

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 butterflies’ life cycle
  - egg to larva to pupa to adult butterfly
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.
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

“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 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

“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
  - Attaches to underwear

- **Disposable pad**
  - Absorbent
  - Widely available
  - Disposable
  - 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
Brainstorm:

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

THANK YOU

the pad project.
this toolkit was created
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