

## Catching the Menstrual Flow

*There are two main ways of absorbing the flow from your period:*

- **Sanitary pads (or napkins)** are special plastic-lined, cotton-filled pads used to catch the blood from your period. They come in different sizes – thicker pads for heavy flow and minipads for lighter flow – and most have a sticky strip on bottom to hold the pads to your underpants. The pad may feel bulky at first, like it will show through your clothes. But the pads don't actually show because they fit close to your body. These pads should be changed every few hours during your heaviest flow. The blood from your period is clean and doesn't have a smell, but it could develop a bad smell when it comes in contact with air. Changing pads often helps keep them from getting a bad smell.
- **Tampons** are another way of absorbing the blood flow from your period. They are made of soft cotton and have a string attached at the bottom. They are inserted into the vagina with the string hanging out of your body. They are removed by pulling on the string. Tampons also come in different sizes, and a smaller size is easier to use at first. You should change tampons every three to four hours, no matter how light the blood flow is.

## Toxic Shock Syndrome

Toxic shock syndrome is a very rare infection that may be caused by using tampons. This is why tampons should be changed every three to four hours. It is also helpful if you switch to a sanitary pad at night instead of a tampon.

Make sure your daughter knows about toxic shock syndrome. She should get medical help immediately if she has any of the symptoms. The symptoms are:

- Sudden high fever
- Vomiting
- Fainting
- Diarrhea
- Dizziness
- Aching muscles
- Flu-like symptoms that get worse quickly
- Red rash that looks and feels like sunburn

## Common Questions

*There are some very common questions most girls have about getting their periods. Following are some of these questions and the answers.*

### •“When will I start my period?”

There is no way to know this for sure. Some signs of puberty may give clues, but you can't predict exactly when it will start.

### •“How often will I get my period?”

Different girls get their periods at different times. On average, the period cycle is 28 days long, but some girls, especially teens, may not have regular periods. Some girls get their periods every two or three weeks, but some girls may have periods a couple of months apart. You can figure out how often you are getting your period by using a calendar to keep track of when you are having your period.

### •“How long will my period last?”

A period will usually last from two to eight days. If you have a very heavy flow every period, you should check with your doctor or health care provider to make sure everything is normal.

### •“How will I know my period has started?”

The first sign is usually a small amount of blood coming out of your vagina. You may notice that your underpants feel a little wet. There isn't much blood when your period first starts, so you will have time to get a pad or tampon.

### •“How much blood is normal?”

The amount of blood is different from period to period, especially at first. Some months you may have a heavy blood flow and some months the flow may be light. At the most, the blood flow is only about 1/2 cup.

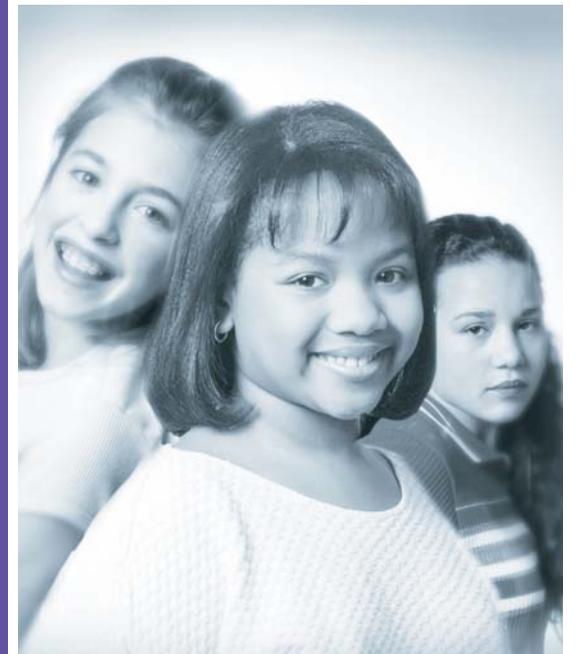
### •“What do I do if my period starts when I'm not at home?”

You should carry a pad or tampon with you. They are usually sold in machines in public restrooms. Many times, there is a place you can get them at school. This may be the school office, or from a school nurse or counselor. If you get blood on your clothes or underpants, you can usually get an excuse to go home and change clothes.

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For help or more information,  
call your local health department  
or the **Info Connection** toll-free at  
**1-800-545-1098**

# Talking with Your Daughter about Menstruation



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## Why You Need To Talk

Starting her period is an important event for a young girl. Some girls are happy about this step toward becoming a mature woman. Others may worry about this change. Girls may be scared or embarrassed. Parents may be embarrassed, too. It is important to help your daughter understand and accept what is happening to her body.

Most girls have their first period around the age of 12 or 13. Because girls grow at different rates, their bodies mature at different times. In some cases, a girl may have her period as young as nine or as late as 16 and be perfectly normal. Before a girl starts having periods, there are usually other changes to her body.

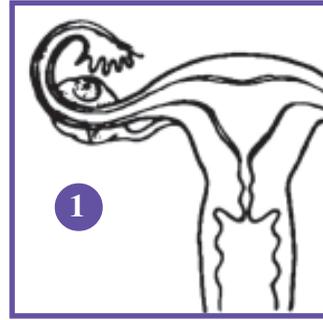
### Some of these changes:

- Breasts develop
- Hips broaden
- Waist becomes smaller and more narrow
- Hair grows around the sexual organs and under the arms
- A white, sticky discharge begins from the vagina

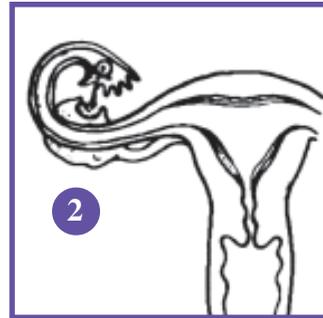
Because female hormones cause these changes, it is common for a girl's feelings and emotions to change as well. She may feel happy and then all of a sudden feel sad or angry. Let her know that this is normal.

## Explaining Menstruation

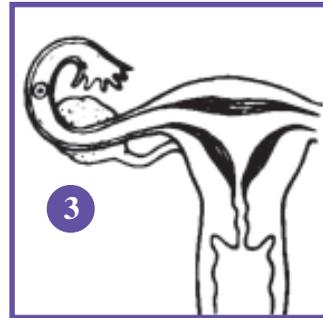
When your daughter gets her first period, it means that she is now able to get pregnant and have a baby. It works like this:



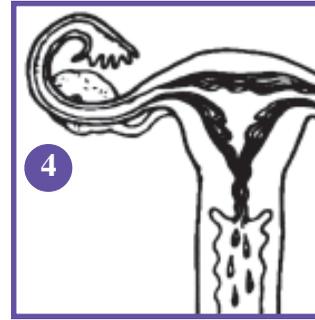
*Her body grows an egg each month. If the egg is fertilized by a man's sperm, she will be pregnant.*



*About two weeks before she gets her period, one of her ovaries releases an egg. This egg is as small as the point of a needle*



*This egg goes down the fallopian tube to the uterus (about four inches). It takes about four days for the egg to do this. As the egg is moving down the fallopian tube, the uterus is building a lining of blood and healthy tissue. If the egg is fertilized, the uterus is ready to take it and help it grow.*



*Most of the time the egg is not fertilized, so the uterus doesn't need the lining it has made. In that case, the egg and the lining leave the uterus and flow through the vagina and out of the body. The substance that comes out of the body is made up of blood and tiny pieces of tissue. This is called menstruation.*

The whole cycle now starts over again. The uterus starts making a new lining, and about two weeks later, another egg is released from an ovary and goes down the fallopian tube.

### What about cramps?

Most girls get cramps from their period at one time or another. Sometimes, the cramping is a dull, achy feeling. Other times, cramps can be painful. No one is really sure what causes cramps. If they are very bad over time, your daughter would need to go to her doctor or nurse.

### Things that can help cramps:

- Using a heating pad or hot water bottle on your stomach or belly
- Taking a warm bath
- Taking an over-the-counter pain reliever such as Tylenol or a pill to relieve cramps
- Gently rubbing or massaging your stomach area

## Other changes:

People often joke about a woman having mood swings or other changes around the time of her period. These changes are not funny to the girl or woman who has them! Fortunately, not all women have many of these problems. Most women have a few changes that are annoying, but not harmful. Most of the time these happen about a week before she starts her period, or during her period.

### Some of these changes:

- Craving for sweets
- Headaches
- Pimples
- Weight gain
- Swollen or tender breasts
- More appetite
- Less energy

