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MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE MANAGEMENT

A Module for Well-Being through
Nutrition

UNESCO Education Sector

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MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE MANAGEMENT

A Module for Well-Being through Nutrition

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A balanced and nutritious diet is key to health and well-being. Kala Sanskriti Foundation, Mumbai, Maharashtra.

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Above: Awareness programme by the Integrated Rural Community Development Society (IRCDS) in Melakamanur village, Tiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu.

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Foreword

Menstruation is a natural and normal part of life for millions of menstruators* around the world, yet it is a source of shame and stigma for far too many. Discriminatory social norms, harassment, cultural taboos and lack of education and access to resources make it difficult for menstruators to manage their menstrual health and hygiene with dignity, safety and comfort.

In India, around 25 million girls enter puberty every year, and one in five girls drop out of school once they start their periods. This is a hindrance that not only denies young girls the opportunity to learn and grow but also perpetuates gender inequalities and reinforces harmful social norms. Adolescent menstruators may face stigma, harassment and social exclusion during menstruation. The general lack of awareness and education on the subject adds to this challenge, preventing menstruators from attending and participating in school and in their communities.

Fortunately, there is a growing awareness about the need to address the issue of Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management (MHHM). Under the **#KeepGirlsInSchool** programme, UNESCO and P&G Whisper India initiated the development of five thematic modules on Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management – for Children and Young Adults; Teachers and Educators; Persons with Disabilities; Gender Empowerment; and Well-Being through Nutrition; as well as a Survey and Gap Analysis Report – to raise awareness on period and puberty education through school curricula and training.

The five teaching-learning modules will also contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Managing

menstruation with safety, dignity and comfort is essential to ensure gender equality, good health and related human rights, which are all key elements of SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 10 (Reducing Inequalities) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

I am honoured to introduce these teaching-learning modules and urge you to use them as tools to educate and empower young people. By doing so, we will destigmatize MHHM and integrate it into a variety of societal agendas as an essential contributor towards gender equality, good health and human rights. Collectively, we can empower young menstruators to be agents of change and contribute to building a more equitable and sustainable world.

The modules are designed as user-friendly tools to raise awareness and inform students, teachers, parents and the whole community about MHHM. We invite all stakeholders to use the teaching-learning modules in their own respective settings and share them with their partners. Together, we can enable young menstruators to unleash their full potential. After all, investing in adolescent girls' and boys' education means investing in a transformative change towards an equitable society for future generations.



Hezekiel Dlamini
OIC (Officer-in Charge)
UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Office,
New Delhi

* Throughout this publication, the term 'girls and women' is often used as a stand in for all menstruators, regardless of gender identity. However, UNESCO reinforces its commitment to equality and human rights, and believes that programmes should be inclusive of all gender groups who have menstrual health and hygiene needs.

Preface

The onset of menstruation coincides with new opportunities and vulnerabilities that arise during adolescence. By improving menstruators' access to necessary information related to Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management (MHHM), we can help them build skills to overcome obstacles to their health, freedom and development.

UNESCO New Delhi and **P&G Whisper India** under the programme **#KeepGirlsInSchool**, and **#LearningNeverStops** emphasizes the need to ensure that menstruators access age-appropriate and comprehensive education on menstruation and key related aspects such as health, nutrition, gender and environment. Taking a lifelong approach to MHHM, the aim of this partnership is to empower all adolescents with access to period and puberty education.

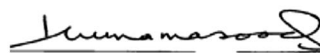
Through the development of five thematic modules on Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management – for Children and Young Adults; Teachers and Educators; Persons with Disabilities; Gender Empowerment; and Well-Being through Nutrition; as well as a Survey and Gap Analysis Report – the objective of this project is to help create a supportive environment for adolescents with interventions at the school, state and national levels to help menstruators continue their education. These teaching-learning modules have been developed with the intent of becoming useful resources for students, teachers, parents and the whole community to better articulate a rationale for the education sector on MHHM.

The five thematic modules contain clear information, interesting case studies, thought-provoking activities, quizzes to check on learning outcomes and infographics for improved information retention, and are aimed at teachers

and students at all levels. The MHHM Module for Well-Being through Nutrition is a teaching-learning resource that focuses on the physical and mental health needs of adolescents going through puberty. The module takes a preventive approach to healthcare via activities, case studies and personal experiences that aim to provide information to learners of all ages on how to maintain their basic nutritional requirements and meet their hygiene needs.

UNESCO believes that MHHM should not be taught in isolation, but rather transacted through an age- and developmentally appropriate education curriculum framework that begins as early as at 5 years of age and continues into young adulthood. The five teaching-learning modules developed by UNESCO intend to prepare learners for life changes, to provide them with a secure environment, and effect changes in attitudes and in teaching and learning approaches.

UNESCO welcomes any feedback and encourage readers to share their comments and experiences. We in the education sector at the UNESCO New Delhi Multisectoral Office invite you and your partners and colleagues to use these teaching-learning modules. Together, we can create good, inclusive policies, curricula, education environments and practices for all learners.



Huma Masood
National Programme Officer
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UNESCO New Delhi Multisectoral Regional Office

Acknowledgements

This module on Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management (MHHM) for Well-Being through Nutrition was a collaborative effort and involved many individuals under the overall guidance and management of Ms Joyce Poan, Chief of the Education Sector, UNESCO New Delhi Multisectoral Regional Office.

For the last two years, Ms Huma Masood, National Programme Officer (Gender and Education), conceptualized this project and patiently provided invaluable technical support and coordination throughout on behalf of the UNESCO Office in New Delhi. She interacted closely with the main researcher, Dr Jitendra Nagpal, to bring this publication to its current form.

This publication is the result of a collaborative process over several rounds of rigorous reviews. This module has been thoroughly peer reviewed by Dr Saroj Yadav, Ms Ayushi Mehta and Mr Karan Dutta, who provided necessary feedback to the research team. Continuous and rigorous reviews were also ensured by Ms Ayushi Mehta, Programme Assistant, Education Sector; and Ms Saya Soma, Mrs Larissa Prata Varela and Ms Aleya Aygor, Volunteer Junior Professional Consultants. The team coordinated and supported the finalization of this publication diligently and seamlessly.

This work would not have been achieved without the support of Mr Chongseo Park, Chief Administrative Officer at the UNESCO Office in New Delhi, and his scrupulous management of grants. The sector duly acknowledges Mr Girish Joshi (Education Sector) for all the necessary financial and administrative support. The coordination, at various levels, in the development

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UNESCO New Delhi is particularly grateful to Ms Ayesha Sarkar of Firefly Communications and her team for their creative designing and meticulous copy-editing of the print-ready version of this publication. Many thanks are also due to the young team at Snow Leopard Pictures, Mr Tanmay Rawat and Ms Arundhati Prasad, who took on the challenge of collecting fresh and positive visuals and video recordings from various states of India, which illustrate this module and will enrich the social media campaign accompanying its launch, with gusto. We appreciate the team at Macro Graphics Pvt Ltd for printing this module in a timely and orderly manner.

Special gratitude is extended to the team at Voice Foundation and their partners: Dr Geeta Malhotra, Country Director, READ India; Mr Akbar Jamali, State Coordinator (Uttar Pradesh), READ India; Ms Swati Piwal, State Coordinator (Maharashtra), READ India; Mr Suneel Kumar Ravi, Executive Secretary, Social Activities for Rural Development Society (SARDS); and Mr P. Stephen, Executive Secretary (Tamil Nadu), Integrated Rural Community Development Society (IRCDS), who coordinated the shoot locations and other logistics.

This publication was made possible by generous financial contributions from Procter and Gamble (P&G) Whisper India.

Note to readers

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the **Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Module for Well-Being through Nutrition**. That you are holding this publication in your hands means that you understand the importance of ensuring that children and adolescents receive age-appropriate information about menstruation. You are also aware that girls must be able to manage their menstrual health and hygiene in a dignified and safe environment to overcome obstacles that can lead to school absenteeism. So we thank you for your commitment to keeping girls in school!

This publication is part of a series of teaching-learning modules developed by UNESCO and P&G Whisper India with the goal of integrating period and puberty education in school curricula. The series is structured into five modules that address key intervention areas related to MHHM, including: 1. building a curriculum that understands the biological and social impacts of puberty; 2. guiding teachers on the menstrual hygiene education curriculum; 3. providing teaching-learning materials geared towards addressing the specific needs of girls with disabilities; 4. highlighting the impact of gender inequalities on menstrual health and hygiene for both girls and boys; and 5. addressing nutritional approaches related to menstrual health and hygiene.

All these modules have been developed by experts in the respective fields and share the following aspects:

- 1 Applicable to both urban and rural audiences.
- 2 Simple language to appeal to a wide range of readers.
- 3 Age differences have been considered.

- 4 All content mapped to learning objectives.
- 5 Topics increase in complexity with successive sections.
- 6 Intended to enhance classroom as well as peer-to-peer learning.
- 7 Each chapter includes a note for teachers, parents and school administrators.
- 8 Geographical diversity kept in mind.

ABOUT THE MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE MANAGEMENT MODULE FOR WELL-BEING THROUGH NUTRITION

This teaching-learning resource seeks to provide young children with a comprehensive overview of puberty education in general and period education in particular from a health and hygiene perspective. This module was developed with the goal of informing students about, and empowering facilitators to discuss, changes that occur in their bodies during puberty, their nutritional requirements, and safe hygiene practices in terms of MHHM.

Each chapter contains explanations of the subject at hand, stories, case studies, learning activities, illustrations and tables designed to provide a better understanding of the issues surrounding MHHM. A glossary is also included to ensure that you, the reader, become familiar with different terms related to menstruation.

We believe that investing in adolescent girls' well-being yields triple dividends: for the girls themselves, for the women they will become and for the next generation. So happy learning!



CHAPTER

1

Introduction



Introduction

This module on Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management (MHHM) and nutrition, health and hygiene seeks to provide young children with

a comprehensive overview of puberty education in general and period education in particular, from a health and hygiene perspective.

Theory of change

This module places itself within the framework of the theory of change, which believes in the dictum that clarity of goals/objectives alongside systematic and comprehensive planning to

achieve them in a phased manner via multiple strategies will lead to the fulfilment of those goals. In this case, our goals and strategies are:

LONG-TERM GOALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students have access to holistic healthcare at home and in school.• Girls are able to live more empowered socio-economic lives.
SHORT-TERM GOALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Girls are better able to manage their periods.• Students have access to medical information and knowledge.• Students are aware of and responsible for their own growth and personalities.• Students have improved personal and environmental hygiene and health.
STRATEGIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve the range of affordable and sustainable menstrual hygiene products and supplies for menstruators across income groups and with diverse needs.• Build/improve water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in households, schools, educational institutions, public spaces and workplaces.• Monitor students' nutritional inputs and ensure that they get a balanced diet.• Conduct campaigns in schools and in public that can engage parents, teachers, community leaders, etc.
PROBLEMS	<p>There is a serious problem related to the availability of and access to menstrual hygiene products and the management of menstruation. Further, the problem lies in healthcare-related issues of health and environmental hygiene leading to serious health problems. There is a lack of sexual and reproductive health knowledge because of the taboos and myths that inhibit conversations around these subjects. Insufficient knowledge of what a balanced diet should be leads to malnutrition and hormonal imbalance. Removing cultural taboos by providing accurate, scientifically verified information on menstruation as a biological process is necessary to resolve these problems.</p>



Right: Mid-day meal, Kala Sanskriti Foundation, Mumbai, Maharashtra.

What does this module aim to do?

Through the development of this teaching-learning material, we hope to inform users of the changes that occur in their bodies during puberty, of the nutrition they require, and of the safe hygiene practices that will allow them to live to their full potential. This material has been developed in a user-friendly, gender-sensitive manner and can be accessed not only by students and teachers but by diverse groups of learners of all ages

We have taken particular care to ensure that the content is age-appropriate and can be accessed and used in diverse settings. We have ensured

that all activities, case studies, assignments and quizzes are accessible to both urban and rural audiences. All activities have been designed to ensure that they can be carried out with limited resources.

Finally, we have paid careful attention to the fact that this module should not only inform but also allow for greater dialogue between all stakeholders. A key factor that we took into account when designing this module was to ensure that its language, content and activities seek to empower students to speak up about their right to healthcare.

Who is this module for?

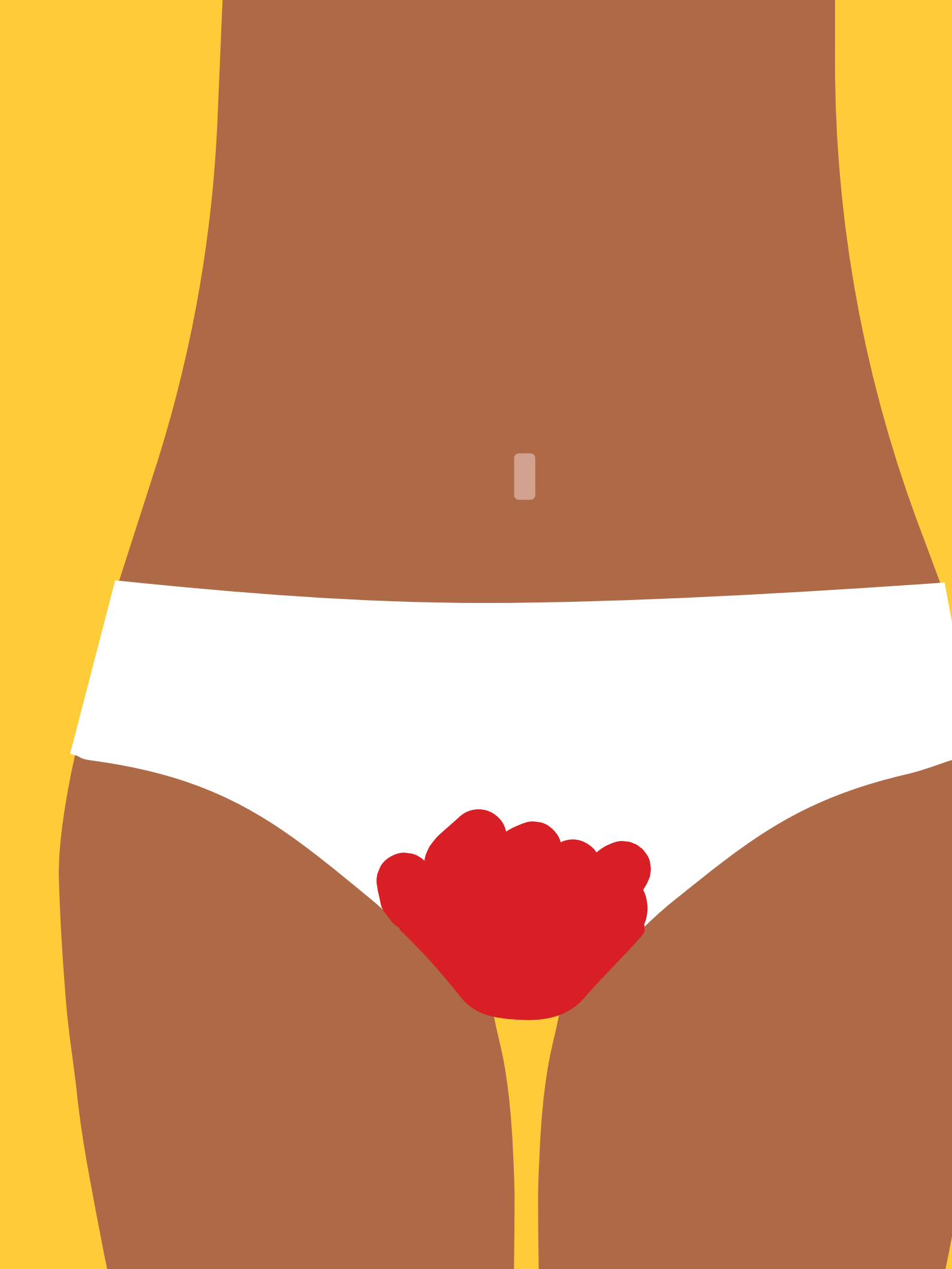
This module is designed for all learners across all ages, genders, socio-economic settings and geographical locations. It begins with extremely basic concepts appropriate for 5-year-old children and progresses to more advanced

concepts for learners aged 18 years and above. This module can also be used by parents, administrators, policy experts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and pre-service and in-service teachers.

How to use this module

This module has been developed in a way that makes it accessible to diverse audiences. The teaching-learning content of the module is divided across three chapters. Each of these chapters is further divided into multiple sub-sections. The learning material is interspersed with case studies, stories, activities and quizzes.

We have developed this module's content in a way that not only informs but also enhances health-seeking behaviour, enables important conversations on puberty and menstruation between key stakeholders, and empowers learners to be able to live healthy and fulfilling lives.



CHAPTER

2

Hygiene matters

2

Hygiene matters

Learning objectives



CHILDREN

Age: Below 10 years

- Understand basic ideas related to puberty, menstruation and hygiene.
- Understand the importance of maintaining personal hygiene.
- Understand the various stages of the menstrual cycle.



ADOLESCENTS

Age: 11 years ~ 18 years

- Able to track their periods.
- Understand the differences between, and advantages and disadvantages of, various menstrual hygiene materials.
- Can maintain personal hygiene and maintain water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities to keep them clean after use.



ADULTS

Age: 18+ years

- Able to understand the socio-economic impact of menstruation.
- Are aware of the medical services available to them.

Introduction to puberty and menstruation

What is puberty?

As you grow older, usually between the ages of 10 and 14 for girls and 12 and 16 for boys, you will reach a stage in your life called 'puberty'. Puberty is a normal part of growing up. During puberty, your body will go through several changes. Depending on whether you are a girl or a boy, puberty is going to affect you differently.¹ Before we go on, let us look at a few definitions of puberty:

According to the National Health Service (NHS) in the United Kingdom, 'Puberty is when a child's body begins to develop and change as they become an adult'.² Therefore, during this stage in your life, you will experience a number of biological/ physical transformations. Puberty can also have an impact on your emotional health. However, puberty is not a single event, but rather a series of changes that will occur over a period

of time (Hayward, 2003). Sometimes, you may start experiencing these changes before the age of 8 years for girls and 9 years for boys. This is called 'precocious puberty'.³

All this information may seem overwhelming but don't worry, this chapter will help you understand all the changes that your body will go through. Let us look at a few puberty changes on the next page.

“

Puberty is when a child's body begins to develop and change as they become an adult.

”

National Health Service (NHS), United Kingdom

¹ <https://www.medicinenet.com/puberty/article.htm>

² <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-or-delayed-puberty/#:~:text=Puberty%20is%20when%20a%20child's,and%20a%20more%20muscular%20appearance>

³ <https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=precocious-puberty-early-puberty-90-P01973>

PUBERTY

Let's begin by discussing a few things that are going to affect all your bodies, irrespective of your sex and gender:

You may get pimples on your face and body.

Hair will grow under your armpits and around your genitals. You may also grow hair on your arms and legs.

You may start sweating more.

You may have some growing pains in your arms and legs.

— Changes in girls —

For girls, your body will change in the following ways:

You will start getting your period.

Your breasts will develop and start getting bigger.

Your hips may get wider.

Your labia may change colour and grow bigger.



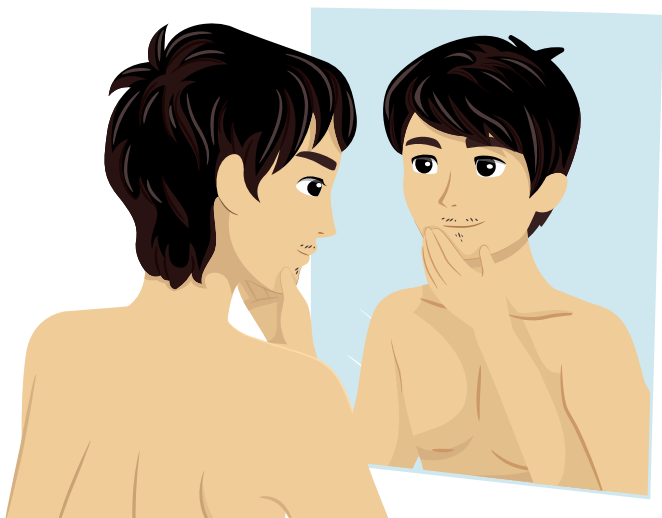
— Changes in boys —

For boys, your body will change in the following ways:

Your voice will get deeper and may crack.

You will grow hair on your face, chest and back.

Your chest and shoulders will get broader.



FEELING FEELINGS

Puberty is controlled by hormones. These hormones control the way you feel and act as well as all the changes that we have discussed above. If you feel like your emotions are out of control or experience highs and lows, don't worry, it's perfectly normal. A good idea is to talk to an adult who has already gone through this stage in their lives. Sharing your feelings positively and holistically with an older sibling, a teacher, your parents or your grandparents will help you deal with your emotions. Always remember, you are not alone in feeling the things you feel and countless others have gone through the same emotions before you!

If you are feeling overwhelmed, here are a few videos to help you understand what you are going through:

- 'Emotional well-being and mental health' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzPcWnrldmw>).
- 'Physical and mental health' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKEWk4oWmjY>).

There is also a fun book called *Minding our Minds* with some interesting activities to help you. It is available here:

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374578.locale=en>



How do I feel?

CHILDREN | ADOLESCENTS

Look at the worksheet below. Read the questions carefully and mark your answers. Discuss your answers with a friend.

Tick the best option according to you:

1 My parents refuse to let me go out late in the evening

- I get angry!
- I stop talking to my parents.
- I'm trying to figure out why they said no.
- They allow my brother to go but not me!

2 I think I am right but adults refuse to listen to me

- I become defensive and argue in a loud voice.
- I feel like they are against me and do not care for me.
- I sit and talk to my parents without shouting at each other.

3 At school, my friend refuses to speak to me and states that he or she prefers to be alone, so I should get out of his or her way

- I'm so enraged that I don't want to speak with him/her.
- I turn and walk away, swearing to myself that I will never speak to him/her again.
- I consider that he/she may not have been feeling well, or that something may have happened to him/her. I make an effort to understand him/her.

4 I think I do not look good

- I reduce my diet, trying to grow thin like a model.
- I start applying make-up all the time.
- I start imitating models and stars.
- I am confident about my looks and do not compare to others! Everyone is different and special in their own ways!

Objective: The teacher / facilitator will then summarize all the responses. The objective of this activity is to develop empathy, decision-making skills and the ability to cope with emotions. Its key messages are understanding others and oneself, and cultivating positive emotions.

What is menstruation?

A key change that will occur in girls' bodies is the onset of menstruation. Understanding what your body will go through, why it will go through these changes, and strategies to best deal with these changes is extremely important to ensure that you aren't surprised or caught unawares. So, let's begin by discussing menstruation!

Menstruation is a monthly occurrence when blood and tissue from your uterus comes out of the vagina. Don't be alarmed! It is completely normal.

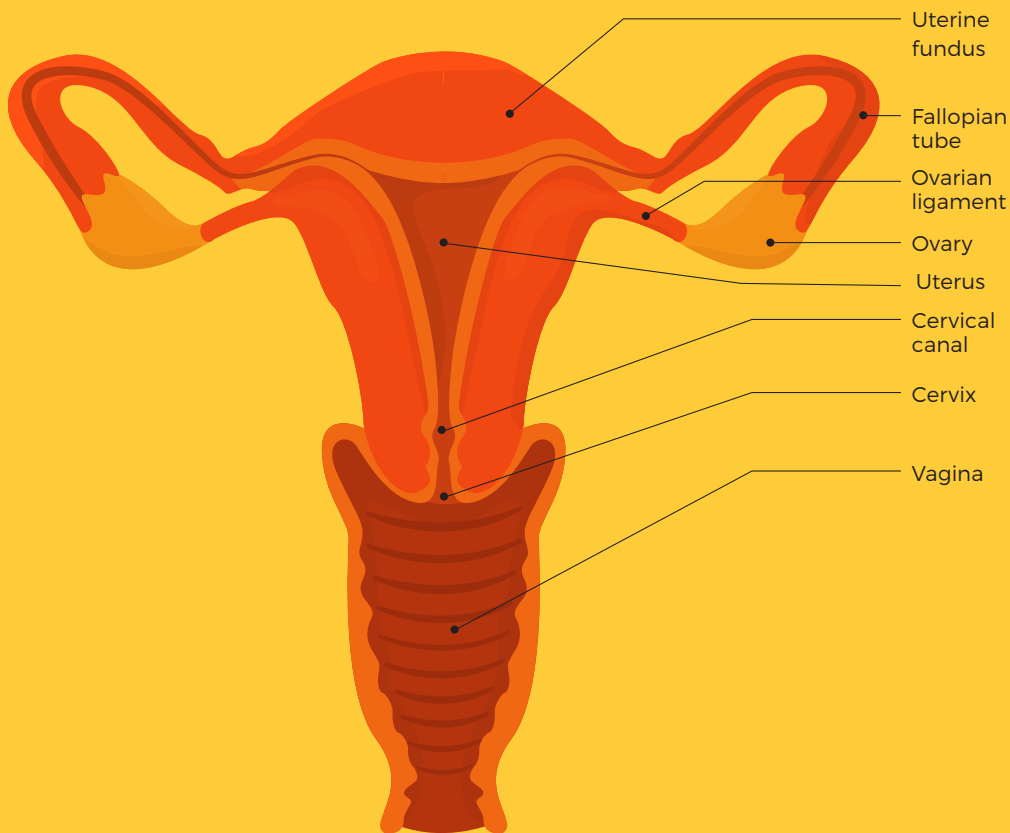
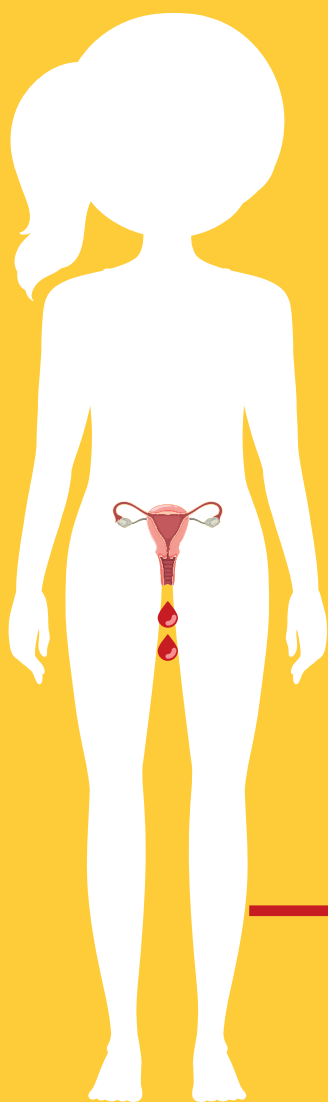
Menstruation is a monthly occurrence when blood and tissue from your uterus comes out of the vagina. Don't be alarmed! This is completely normal. Let us understand how this happens.

Your menstrual cycle is primarily controlled by hormones like oestrogen and progesterone. Let's look at the diagram of your reproductive system and talk about what happens during your menstrual cycle.

You have a total of two ovaries that contain many minuscule eggs. During your menstrual cycle, one of these eggs matures, i.e. it becomes ready to be fertilized by sperm. Your ovaries release the mature egg, which then travels through your fallopian tubes towards your uterus. The hormones that control your menstrual cycle thicken the lining of your uterus. The uterus, with its thick and spongy lining, becomes the place where a fertilized egg will rest. This lining consists of both tissue and blood.

If you aren't pregnant, your body will no longer need that lining. Thus, the lining breaks down and all the blood, nutrients and tissues flow out of your body through your vagina. This entire process is called the menstrual cycle, and the time when the lining flows out of the body is called menstruation, more commonly referred to as a period.

FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM





A few common questions you might have about your period

WHEN WILL MY PERIODS BEGIN?

The beginning of your period is called menarche. There's no knowing exactly when you'll get it, but most people get their periods between the ages of 12 years and 14 years. However, because all of us have different bodies, they can start earlier or later.

WHEN WILL MY PERIODS STOP?

Most people stop getting their periods between the ages of 45 years and 55 years. The end of your period is called menopause. After menopause, you can't get pregnant anymore.

WHAT IS A NORMAL PERIOD?⁴

Different people experience their periods differently. It is perfectly normal to bleed for two days to seven days. Most people lose between one tablespoon to seven tablespoons of blood during their periods, and thus it is very important to keep yourself hydrated, maintain a healthy diet and proper hygiene. The first few years of your period may not necessarily be regular, and you may experience different symptoms. As you grow older, managing your periods will get easier. But tracking your periods is essential to understanding what is 'normal' for you. It will help you understand if something goes wrong.

⁴ <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/teens/puberty/what-can-i-expect-when-i-get-my-period>

HOW DO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES EXPERIENCE MENSTRUATION DIFFERENTLY?

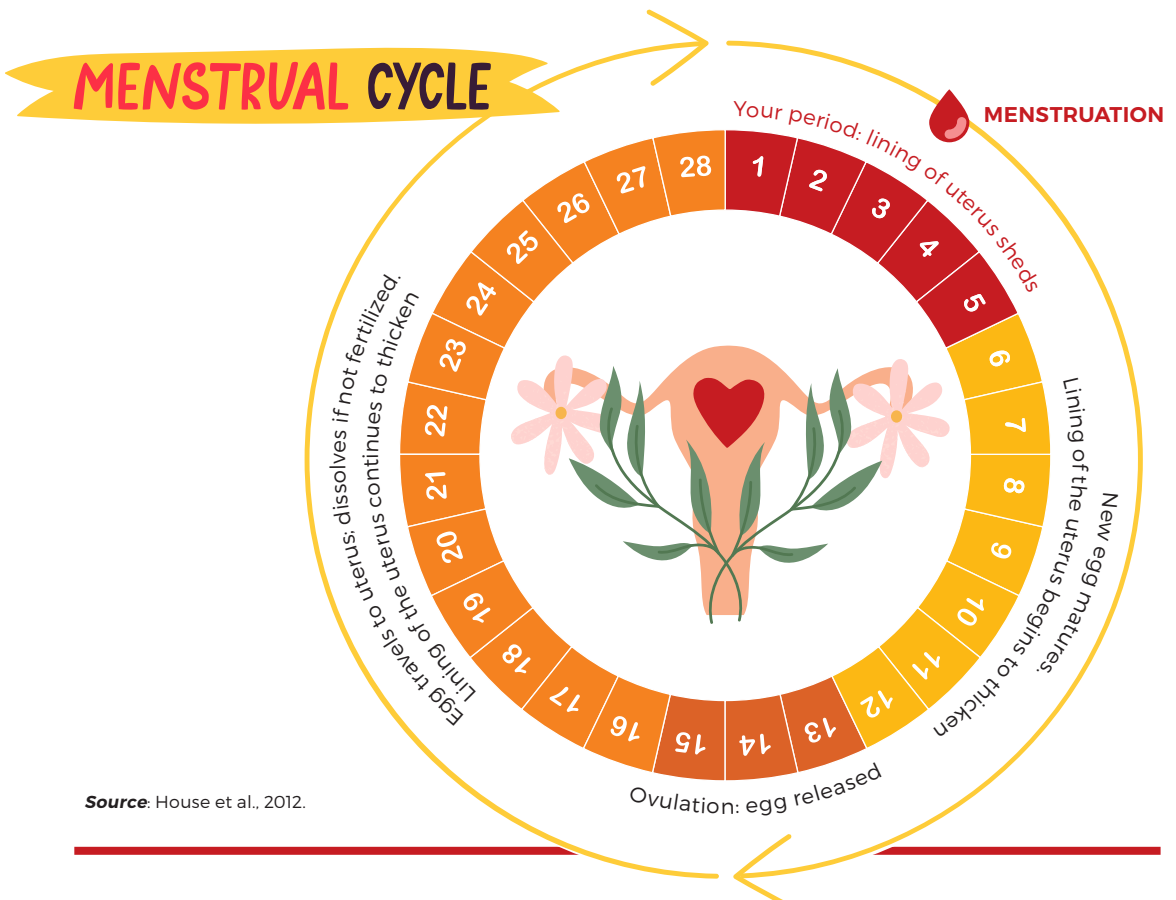
While most persons with disabilities experience their menstruation the same way as a person without disabilities, there are external factors that pose difficulties for them. The lack of period and puberty education, lack of access to sinks and bathrooms, and restricted or no access to period products make for a difficult experience.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY PERIOD IS COMING?

There may be some signs that your period is coming, but they aren't universal, i.e. not everyone experiences the same changes. You may get pimples, experience some bloating and feel emotional. You or some of your friends may get cramps in your bellies, backs or legs. This is why it is important to keep track of your menstrual cycle so that you are better prepared for your periods.

I'M FEELING ANXIOUS ABOUT MY PERIOD, WHAT DO I DO ABOUT IT?

Feeling anxious or scared about your periods is normal. Just remember you are not the only person that has gone through this before and there are many people more than willing to help you. Talking about your fears and anxieties is the best way to deal with them. Talk to your parents, teachers, elder siblings or a relative you trust. Being prepared beforehand is essential, and this module is here to inform you and help you prepare.



UNDERSTANDING THE MALE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

The organs of the male reproductive system are specialized for:

- Production, nourishment and transportation of sperm and semen.
- Discharge of sperm during ejaculation.
- Production and secretion of male sex hormones.

Some important parts of the male reproductive organ include:

- **Penis:** The male organ for passing urine and semen through a tube called the **urethra**. The outer erectile tissue gets tense with blood during sexual arousal causing an erection.
- **Scrotum:** A protective bag for the testes. It controls the temperature of the testes at

5 °C to 6 °C below body temperature for better sperm production and survival.

- **Testes:** The testes perform the vital function of producing sperm or making sperm cells for the process of reproduction. The two testes start producing sperm at puberty.

During puberty, the male body goes through many changes. This is the time when a boy:

- Attains adult height and body proportions.
- Grows external characteristics.
- Attains reproductive ability.

Slow and gradual changes in physical and psychological development happen to a boy during puberty, between the ages of 9 years and 14 years.



ACTIVITY

Break the ice

ADOLESCENTS



- 1 Cut some strips of paper and write some questions like those below upon them.
- 2 Place the strips of paper in a bowl and pass the bowl around the room from student to student. Every student will pick a strip of paper from the bowl when the bowl comes to him/her.
- 3 The student will respond to the question on the strip that he/she picks out of the bowl.
- 4 Answer the question and pass the bowl to the next student.



Here are a few sample questions that can help start the conversation:

- 1 How has my voice changed in the last year?
- 2 Has my body changed in the last year?
- 3 Have I been able to talk to anyone about the changes I have gone through in the last year?
- 4 Whom do I rely upon to discuss my bodily changes?
- 5 Do the boys in class discuss their bodies with each other?
- 6 Do the girls in class discuss their bodies with each other?

Objective: Conversations around puberty can be quite difficult. Often, adolescents may feel that they are the only ones going through the changes that come with puberty. But that is rarely ever true. Most of their friends are going through the exact same changes – both physically and emotionally. The purpose of this activity is to enable students to realize that they are not alone and that they should work together with their friends during challenging times.

Stages of a menstrual cycle

Your menstrual cycle of roughly 28 days can be divided into four main phases: menstrual, follicular, ovulation and luteal. Let us now learn what happens to your body during each of these phases:

1 MENSTRUAL PHASE

The menstrual phase lasts from Day 1 to Day 5 of the menstrual cycle. During this period, the uterus sheds its lining of tissue and blood vessels, which exit the body as menstrual fluid. It is common to experience menstrual cramps during this period because the uterine and abdominal muscles will contract to expel menstrual fluid.

2 FOLLICULAR PHASE

The follicular phase lasts from Day 1 to Day 13 of the menstrual cycle. During this phase, the pituitary gland releases a hormone that allows for the growth of egg cells in the ovaries. One of these eggs then matures in a follicle, which is a sac-like structure. The egg takes thirteen days to mature. During this period, the follicle also releases a hormone that stimulates the uterus to develop a lining of blood vessels and tissue called the endometrium.

3 OVULATION PHASE⁵

The ovulation phase is on Day 14 of the menstrual cycle. The pituitary gland releases a hormone that releases the egg cell from the ovary. The cilia (hair-like projections) of fimbriae (finger-like projections at the end of the fallopian tubes) move the egg into a fallopian tube.

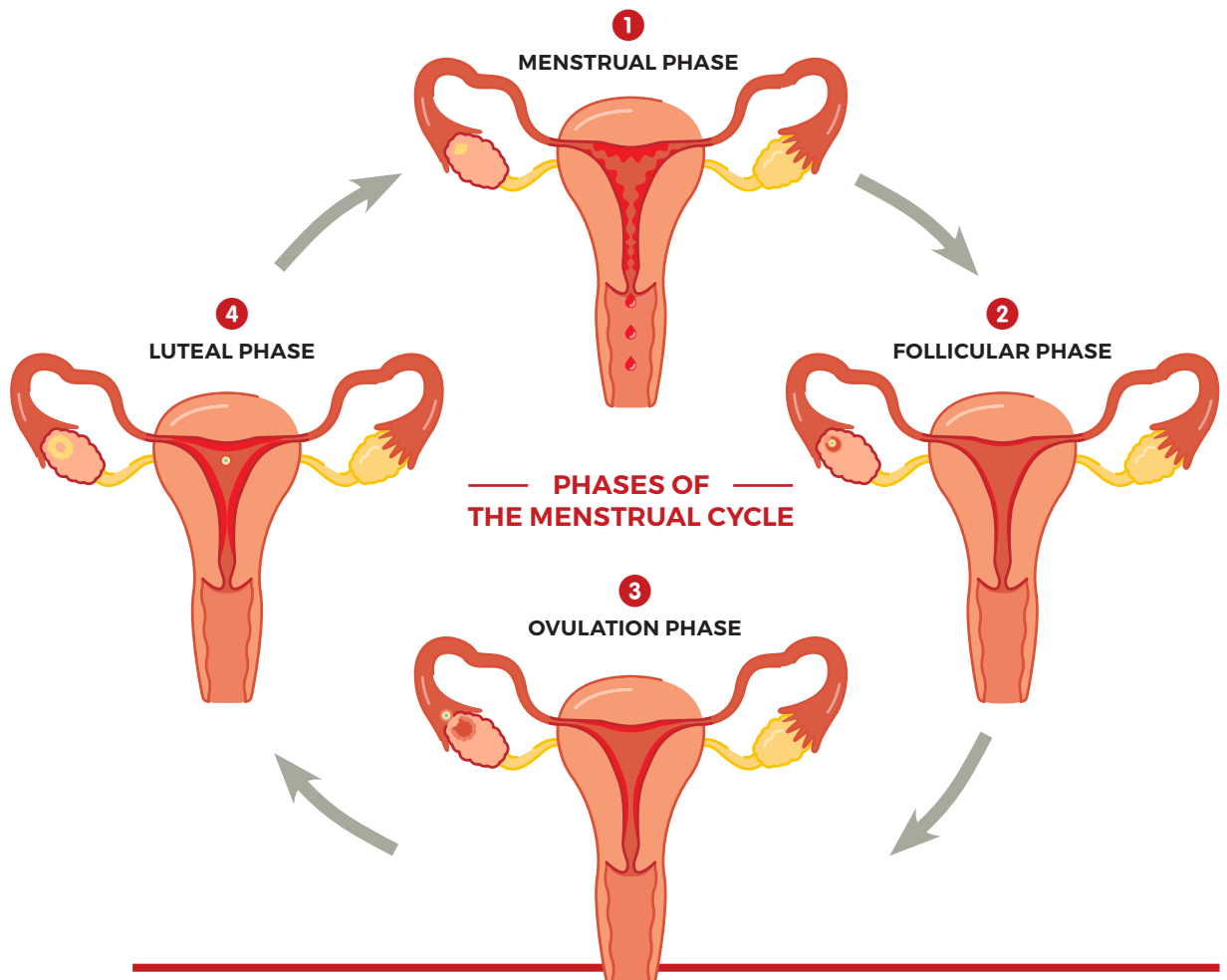
4 LUTEAL PHASE

The luteal phase lasts from Day 15 to Day 28 (which is the final day of an average menstrual cycle). The egg cell stays in a fallopian tube for 24 hours. If it is not impregnated by a sperm cell during this time, the egg disintegrates.

While these stages are common to most menstruators, they are not universal. Persons with disabilities may experience menarche and menstruation differently. These experiences could include more painful or heavy periods, hygiene issues as well as changes linked to premenstrual syndrome.⁶

⁵ <https://www.menstrupedia.com/articles/physiology/cycle-phases>

⁶ <https://menstrualhygieneday.org/managing-menstruation-for-women-and-girls-with-disabilities/#:~:text=Women%20and%20girls%20with%20disabilities%20may%20experience%20menarche%20and%20menstruation,compared%20to%20non%20disabled%20women>



MENSTRUAL PAIN

— PMS Symptoms —



Headache



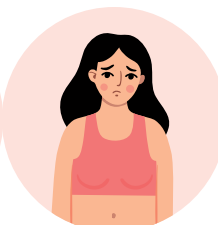
Abdominal pain



Acne



Back pain



Swollen breasts



Nausea

— Treatment —



Shower



Hot-water bag



Analgesics



Healthy food



Herbal tea

Premenstrual syndrome

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) includes emotional and bodily changes that occur during your periods. Some common symptoms are:

- Cramps.
- Bloating.
- Breakouts such as pimples.
- Sore breasts.
- Tiredness.
- Mood swings (rapid changes in your emotions).

Some individuals may experience such symptoms before or during their periods, while others may not. Some transgender persons may also experience PMS. You and your friends will also experience these symptoms in different degrees of severity. Some of you may not experience them at all while others may experience painful cramps. Using a heating pad, exercising, taking a bath in warm water, simply stretching your body, or taking a painkiller (please consult a doctor before doing so) can help alleviate the pain.



QUIZ!

- 1** Which of the following changes cannot happen to your body during puberty:
 - A. Growth of pimples on your body and face.
 - B. Growth of hair on your body.
 - C. Swelling up of fingers.

- 2** Which hormone is responsible for changes in girls' bodies during puberty?
 - A. Testosterone.
 - B. Oestrogen.
 - C. Insulin.

- 3** How often will an average girl have her period?
 - A. Once a year.
 - B. Once a month.
 - C. Once a week.

- 4** Which of the following is a stage in the menstrual cycle?
 - A. Menstrual phase.
 - B. Follicular phase.
 - C. Ovulation phase.
 - D. Luteal phase.
 - E. All of the above.

- 5** During puberty, your emotions may be:
 - A. Happy.
 - B. Sad.
 - C. Angry.
 - D. All of the above.

Answers - 1: C | 2: B | 3: B | 4: E | 5: D



Right: Students of Government High School in Goonipalayam village, Tiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu.

Introduction to hygiene

What is hygiene?

Every day, as you sit to eat your lunch, your teachers or parents ask you to wash your hands before you start eating. Have you ever wondered why? They do so to ensure that your hands are free from dirt before you touch your food. This dirt can include many tiny organisms such as bacteria and germs that may be harmful to you if they go into your body. Washing your hands before you eat ensures that your hands are clean, helps maintain your health and prevents the spread of diseases. All these factors count as 'hygiene'.

However, maintaining proper hygiene isn't restricted to simply washing your hands. Every single part of your body must be kept clean

– from head to toe. So, as your body changes and you reach puberty, let's take a look at a few things you need to do to keep yourself healthy.

Personal hygiene

In this section, let us go through a few general hygiene practices that are applicable to all of us.

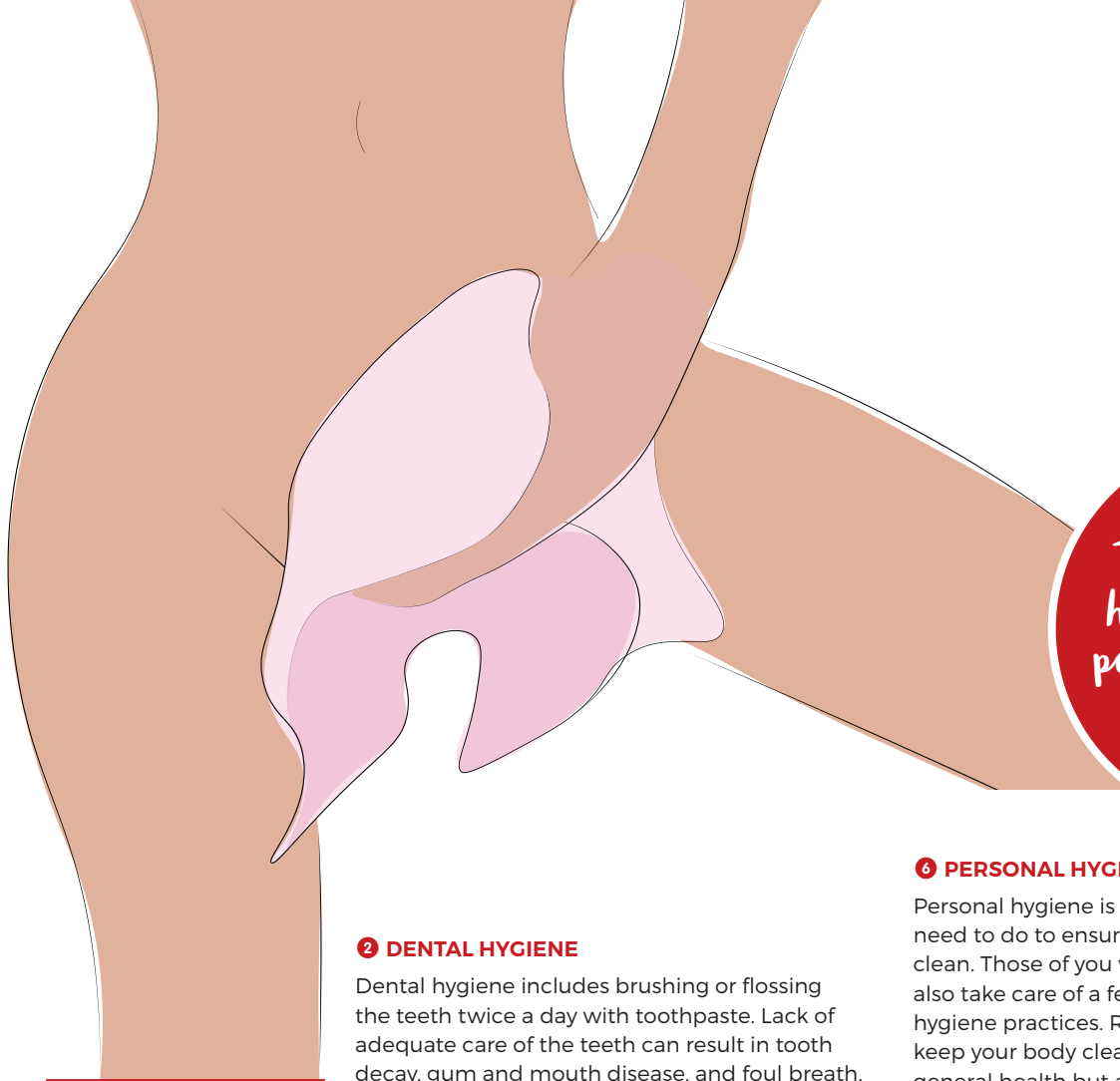
Personal hygiene means keeping your body neat and clean, thus making it less vulnerable to infections. The world we live in is vulnerable to all kinds of bacterial and viral infections. Therefore, maintaining personal hygiene can help us lead a safer, healthier, better and longer life, regardless of our gender. Here are a few basic hygiene practices that each of you should follow:

1 BODY HYGIENE

Each of you has a different body odour due to the different pheromones and chemicals secreted in your sweat. It is important to wash your body well every day, especially the armpits and genitals. Although it is better to wash sensitive parts of your body with plain water or salt water, other parts of the body can be cleaned with body wash, soap or shower gel. After taking your bath, when your body is dry, you can apply deodorants to prevent body odour. It is necessary to wash your hair with shampoo once a week or more, as needed.

PERSONAL HYGIENE CHECKLIST

- Y N I wash my hands regularly.
- Y N I brush my teeth twice a day.
- Y N I clean the outer part of my ear frequently (remember do not insert anything in your ear).
- Y N I use soap to wash my body daily.
- Y N I use plain water to wash my eyes every morning.



The first step to having a smooth period is to keep a clean body.

2 DENTAL HYGIENE

Dental hygiene includes brushing or flossing the teeth twice a day with toothpaste. Lack of adequate care of the teeth can result in tooth decay, gum and mouth disease, and foul breath.

3 HANDWASHING

It is very important to wash your hands before and after preparing or consuming any food. You should also wash your hands after going to the bathroom, handling trash and handling pets or pet-related food. It is also important to clean your hands before performing any medical procedure, even as small as treating a wound or cut. Since hands are the primary carriers of germs and bacteria, it is always advisable to carry a small sanitizer wherever you go, to prevent infections.

4 GENITAL HYGIENE FOR MEN

Uncircumcised men can wash their genitals by gently pulling back and cleaning underneath the foreskin and tip of the penis using plain water and mild soap. After washing, make sure to pat dry the genitals. A thick white discharge, called smegma, under the foreskin is common.

5 GENITAL HYGIENE FOR WOMEN

In the case of women, vaginas are self-cleaning, and using soap can cause pH imbalance. However, the vulva can be cleaned once a day using mild soap-free wash, plain water or salt water. During menstruation, it is important to change your sanitary pad every 6 hours. Tampons should be changed within 3 hours to 4 hours, and menstrual cups should be sterilized before every use.

Vaginas are self-cleaning. However, the vulva can be cleaned once a day using mild soap-free wash, plain water or salt water.

6 PERSONAL HYGIENE FOR MENSTRUATORS

Personal hygiene is a series of simple things you need to do to ensure that you keep your body clean. Those of you who are menstruators must also take care of a few things other than general hygiene practices. Remember, if you do not keep your body clean, it can impact not just your general health but also your menstrual health. The first step to having a smooth period is to keep a clean body.

Here are a few things you can do before, during and after your periods, to maintain your personal hygiene:

- Use warm water to wash your vulva. Keep your vulva clean and dry and use a clean towel or cloth to dry the area after you have washed it.
- Preferably wear clean cotton underwear. Underwear made of artificial fibres such as nylon, acetate, etc. are not great choices if you have delicate skin or are prone to irritation.
- Avoid using scented oil, talc or powder that can irritate the vulvar region.
- Ensure that your underclothes are clean, double rinse them if you have to, and avoid using too much laundry soap as it may cause irritation.

Hygiene and puberty

It is important for your health and safety that you keep your body clean and take steps to ensure that you are well prepared for all the changes that are to come with puberty. For girls especially, as mentioned before, you will start having your period every 20 days to 35 days. This requires some preparation in advance. But don't worry! We've got you covered.



Menstrual hygiene

Maintaining proper hygiene during your periods is critical to ensuring your health. There are two key aspects to menstrual hygiene:

1 Personal hygiene

Maintaining a clean body and ensuring you have access to proper hygiene materials. We will discuss these later in this chapter.

2 Environmental hygiene

Maintaining a clean environment, having access to clean water and a safe and sanitary environment, which includes access to safe disposal of menstrual hygiene products. This is essential for maintaining your health and hygiene.

Tracking your periods - why, how and what?

Along with maintaining a clean body, it is also important that you take care of a few other things as you start menstruating. First and foremost among these is to track your periods. But before we go into the tools to help you track your periods, let's discuss why you need to keep track.

A change in your menstrual cycle can be a symptom of underlying health issues. The better you know your body and its cycles, the easier it will be to understand when something isn't quite right. If you have a regular menstrual cycle that becomes irregular, it may indicate other healthcare issues. Thus, tracking your periods can help you understand what is happening to your body and indicate when you may need to consult a physician.

However, an irregular period isn't always a cause for worry. Often, a new exercise regime or a period of stress can impact your menstrual cycle. Still, checking with your doctor is a good idea if your periods become irregular.

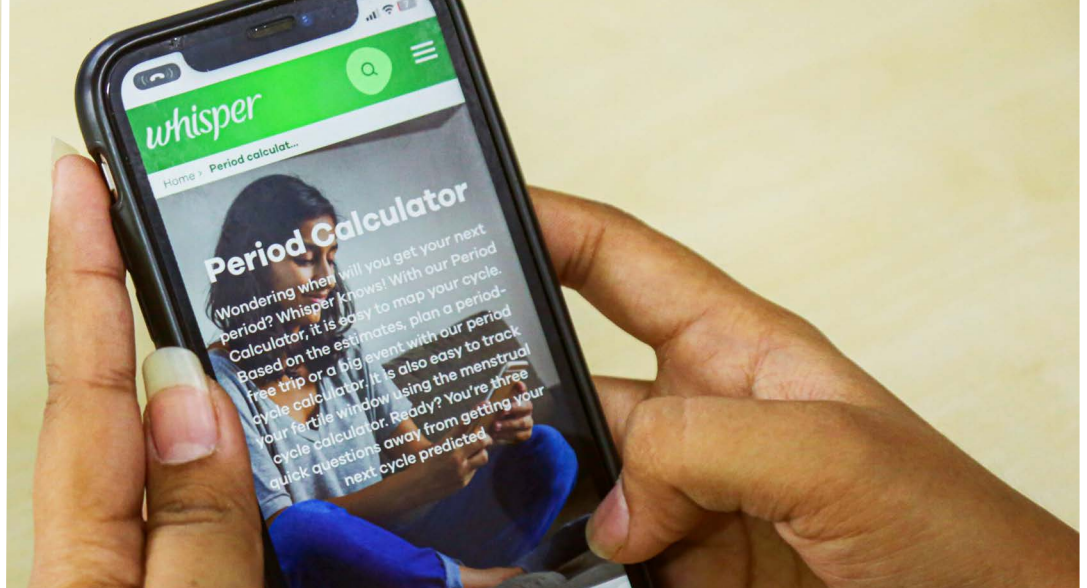
Let's now understand the ways we can track our periods.

The simplest way to keep track of your periods is using paper and pen. Make or buy a calendar for the month and then ensure you mark, at minimum, the first day of your periods. Marking all the days of your periods is even better! This is equally important for girls with disabilities, who can use apps such as Clue, which are specially designed to help persons with disabilities.



Right: Teaching and learning menstrual hygiene, MPP School, Yellareddypalle village, Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh.

Period-tracking apps not only help you keep a record of the days and dates related to your periods, many of them also remind you to stock up on sanitary pads or tampons so that your periods don't come as a surprise.



However, you aren't limited to using pen and paper. Thanks to advancements in technology, there are several digital means you can use to keep track of your periods. Here are a few apps made for this purpose. These apps not only help you keep a record of the days and dates related to your periods, many of them also remind you to stock up on sanitary pads or tampons so that your periods don't come as a surprise:⁷

- Period Tracker.
- P-Log.
- Fertility Friend Mobile.
- Maya.
- Love Cycles Menstrual Calendar.
- Clue.
- M Calendar.

Keeping track of your periods isn't just about maintaining a record of dates and days. There are a few other things that you need to keep in mind and write down when maintaining a record of your periods. These include:

Period heaviness

Understanding the flow of your menstrual blood can help you choose the type of sanitary pads,

tampons or indigenous hygiene materials such as cloth pads that you require. Anticipating this can help you plan for your periods in advance.

Changes in mood

If you experience PMS or premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), your mood may fluctuate from time to time. Keeping track of your mood during your periods can help you be better prepared beforehand.

Energy levels and appetite

Monitoring your energy levels and appetite during your periods can help you prepare before your next period. Often, you may have to take part in sports and physical activity during your period. Don't worry, as long as your energy levels keep up, you should be able to take part in all sports! In fact, keeping active by playing multiple sports such as cricket, volleyball, kabaddi and kho-kho can help reduce cramps. If you feel excessively hungry during the first few days of your period, keep some healthy snacks at hand, such as eggs, beans, dates, nuts, citrus-rich fruits like oranges, etc.



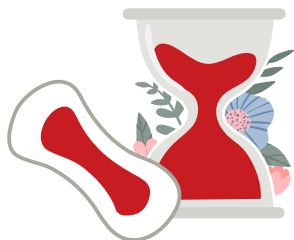
Making your own period tracker!

ALL MENSTRUATING AGE GROUPS

Using the tips above, why don't you try to make your own period tracker! All you need is a sheet of paper and a pencil. Mark down all the things you think should be included – and remember to follow through every month!

Objective: This activity will help menstruators understand their menstrual cycle better, develop awareness of their overall well-being, and plan the management of their menstrual health and hygiene.

⁷ <https://www.indiatvnews.com/buzz/tech-auto/five-best-period-tracking-apps-38.html>; <https://scroll.in/magazine/818410/period-tracking-apps-show-how-little-indian-women-are-actually-taught-about-their-bodies>



Change your pad every 4 hours to 5 hours, before it is completely soaked.

Menstrual hygiene materials

There are several menstrual hygiene products that are available to help you manage your periods. However, in many places in India, there are several myths and taboos related to menstrual hygiene materials that can be harmful to your health. In this section, we will look at several menstrual hygiene materials and tell you which ones are good and which ones are bad for your health, how to use them and how to use them in a sustainable manner. Let's begin!

Napkins or sanitary pads

Napkins or sanitary pads are rectangles of absorbent material that can be attached to your underwear. The pads absorb your menstrual blood and ensure that your clothes do not get soiled. Some of these pads have 'wings' that can fold over the edges of your underwear and help keep the pad securely in place.

⁸ <https://www.simplehealth.com/blog/a-history-of-menstrual-hygiene>

Below: Students of Primary School, Patwai village, Rampur district, Uttar Pradesh.

? DID YOU KNOW?⁸

Historians believe that women in ancient Egypt made tampons out of softened papyrus. Elsewhere, in ancient Greece, Hippocrates, the father of medicine, writes that women made tampons by wrapping bits of wood with lint, while others were thought to use sea sponges as tampons.

To ensure that you find the right pad for yourself, you need to know what kind of flow you have during your periods. There are different kinds of pads available for different kinds of flow, varying in size and absorbency.

USING YOUR PADS

You should change your pad every 4 hours to 5 hours, before it is completely soaked. Keep in mind that this depends on your flow. If you are experiencing heavy flow, then ensure you change your pads more often.





ADVANTAGES OF SANITARY NAPKINS

There are several advantages to using sanitary pads over other menstrual hygiene materials:

- They are more convenient than other materials.
- The blood gets absorbed in the middle layer and does not leave you uncomfortable.

- If you change them at regular intervals, they are great at preventing infections.
- They can be used by women of all groups.
- They allow for greater mobility.

WHERE CAN I FIND A PAD?

The Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) mission began in 2005 under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, aiming to bring awareness of the healthcare system by binding it together.⁹ ASHA workers are primarily women, who are sent as educators, communicators and promoters in their communities.

Menstrual hygiene must be a priority in rural areas, where there is a lack of awareness about hygiene and no access

to sanitary napkins. Under the Menstrual Health Scheme, ASHA workers have been distributing sanitary napkins at a subsidized rate of INR 6 per pack to adolescent girls aged 10 years to 19 years in rural areas, especially schools and Anganwadi centres. A pack consists of six napkins. This programme aims to promote access to low-cost napkins as a step towards providing choices to women as per their comfort and convenience.

Top: An ASHA worker in Mogullapalli village, Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh.

DISPOSING OF YOUR PADS

It is very important that you dispose of your pads properly, safely and hygienically. If you do not, dirty pads can lead to infections such as hepatitis B and C and can attract insects and flies.

- Make sure that you wrap your pad in paper before throwing it in a bin. You might even use the wrapper in which pads come to dispose of the pad. Ensure that the bin is covered.

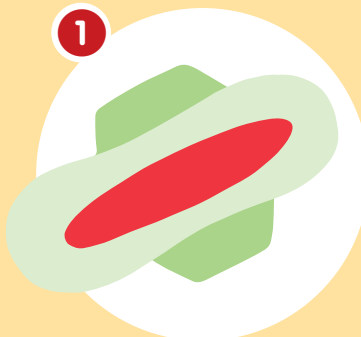
- Do not throw your pads in a pit latrine or toilet. It can fill up pretty quickly. Flushing your pads down the toilet can block the toilet.



DISPOSING OF PADS: THE RIGHT WAY

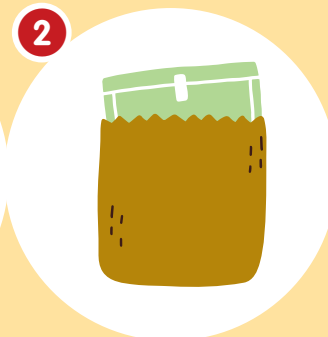
Take the used pad

1



Wrap it in a paper or in a leakproof bag

2



Dispose of the wrapped pad in a dustbin

3



Use trash cans or dustbins located inside cabinets, like under the bathroom sink, or ones with lids

ACTIVITY

Make a poster

CHILDREN | ADOLESCENTS | ADULTS

Design an informational poster on how to dispose of a sanitary napkin. These posters can be displayed throughout your school!

Make groups of five, including boys and girls, for this activity. Each group should do some research on the different ways of disposing of pads. Remember to look at safe as well as unsafe ways and mention both in the chart. Look up different types of toilets to include in

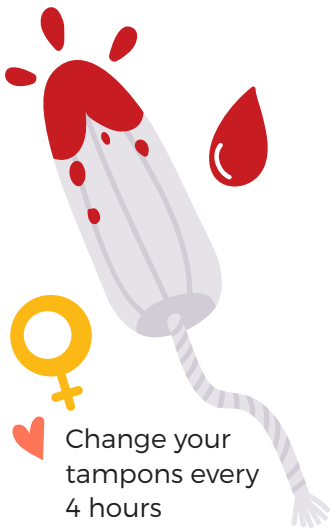
your chart. Make sure you include toilets for students with disabilities.

Print out the pictures or, even better, discover your artistic side by drawing them!

Be creative in your presentation! Remember, the more colourful you make it, the more the chances of people looking at the chart and learning from it.

Objective: This activity will instil a sense of peer-to-peer learning and teamwork and help to build research acumen while advocating for environmentally friendly and sustainable ways of disposing of waste generated during menstruation.

⁹ <https://nhm.gov.in/index1.php?lang=1&level=3&sublinkid=1021&iid=391>



Change your tampons every 4 hours to 6 hours.

Tampons

Tampons are another great way of managing your periods. A tampon is a small tube made of absorbent material that is inserted into the vagina to absorb menstrual blood. It has a string at one end, which stays outside your body. The string is there to help you remove the tampon. Like sanitary pads, tampons come in different sizes and absorbencies for heavier or lighter periods.

USING YOUR TAMPONS

- Check its absorbency when you select your tampon.
- Because a tampon is inserted into your vagina, you won't know when it is saturated. So remember to change your tampon regularly. Tampons should be changed every 4 hours to 6 hours.
- Never leave your tampon in all day and night. Doing this will put you at risk of infections and toxic shock syndrome.

WHAT IS TOXIC SHOCK SYNDROME?¹⁰

Toxic shock syndrome is a serious medical condition caused by bacteria. Symptoms can include a sudden rise in temperature, rapid drop in blood pressure, diarrhoea, headache, rashes and muscle aches.

Please ensure that you buy tampons from medical stores. **Do not make your own tampon** as it can hurt your body and may lead to serious infections. Tampons cannot be made at home. Only cotton and cloth sanitary napkins can be made at home.

DISPOSING OF YOUR TAMPONS

- Wrap your tampon in paper and throw it in a bin.
- If your school has an incinerator, dispose of your tampons in bins marked for the incinerator.

¹⁰ <https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/tss.html>

Menstrual cups



Above: Menstrual cups can be used for up to 12 hours

Facing page:

A teacher explains the use of tampons. Government High School, Goonipalayam village, Tiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu.

A menstrual cup is a reusable hygiene product that can last up to 12 hours depending on the flow of menstrual blood. It is a small, flexible cup that is made of silicone or latex rubber. Unlike a tampon or a pad, it does not absorb the flow but rather collects it in a cup. Since most menstrual cups are reusable, it is a more sustainable product and can be used for many years without needing to be replaced. Also, since they are larger, menstrual

cups can hold twice the amount of menstrual blood as tampons or pads.

Ensure that you speak to the elders in your family and do your research before using a menstrual cup. Menstrual cups may not be available at all medical stores, so check to see that the cup is safe and sanitary and comes from a verified source before buying one.

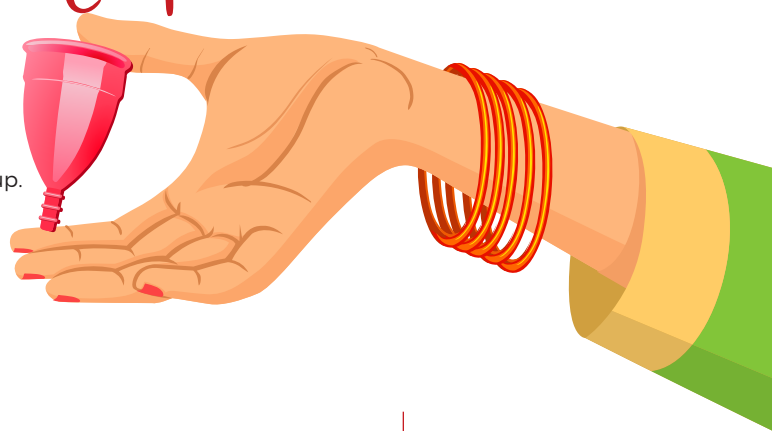
USING YOUR MENSTRUAL CUP

- Make sure you get the right fit since cups come in different sizes.
- Wash the cup after every use. If a cup isn't cared for or cleaned properly, it may irritate or infect your vagina.
- Check whether your cup is reusable. If it isn't, throw it away after you have removed it.
- If you have a latex allergy, check the material used to make your menstrual cup before wearing it. While most menstrual cups are made from latex-free material, you can never be too careful.

MENSTRUAL CUP

How to use a menstrual cup

- 1 Wash your hand thoroughly.
- 2 Apply water or water-based lube to the rim of the cup.
- 3 Tightly fold the menstrual cup in half, holding it in one hand with the rim facing up.
- 4 Insert the cup, rim up, into your vagina like you would a tampon without an applicator. It should sit a few inches below your cervix.
- 5 Once the cup is in your vagina, rotate it. It will spring open to create an airtight seal that stops leaks.



Do's

- Wash your hand properly.
- Place your index finger and thumb into your vagina. Pull the stem of the cup gently until you can reach the base.
- Pinch the base to release the seal and pull down to remove the cup.
- Once it's out, empty the cup into the sink or toilet.
- A menstrual cup lasts 5 years to 10 years on average, as long as you don't bend it all the time and break it.

Disadvantages

- Cup removal can be messy.
- Hard to find the right fit.
- Vaginal irritation.



Above and facing page:
Learning how to use
cloth pads, Kala Sanskriti
Foundation, Mumbai,
Maharashtra.

Cloth material

If you do not have access to any of the above materials, a simple alternative is to use a thoroughly cleaned soft cotton cloth. It is important that you choose the right material when preparing your cloth napkins, since thick or heavy cotton cloth will cause friction and irritate your thighs and genital region.

USING YOUR CLOTH PADS

- The cloth must be changed every 4 hours to 5 hours.
- Never use moist cloth as it increases the chances of infections.
- If you are disposing of the cloth, ensure that you wash it, wrap it and then dispose of it.

- If you are reusing the cloth, ensure that it is washed thoroughly and then dried in a hygienic place.

ADVANTAGES OF USING CLOTH PADS

- The material is easily available at home and can be reused.
- Old cotton absorbs blood quite well.
- Cloth can be buried in the soil. Since it is made out of cotton, it will decompose.

DISADVANTAGES OF USING CLOTH PADS

- Cloth can become very heavy and may cause friction between the thighs and genitals.
- If cloth pads are not cleaned and stored properly, they can pose a high risk of infection.

HOW TO CLEAN CLOTH PADS

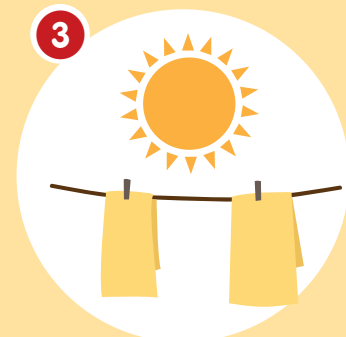
Soak used pads for
20 minutes in room-
temperature water



Rinse with soap water and
rub with hands.
Do not use a brush



Dry pads in
direct sunlight or in
an airy place





CASE STUDY

How unsanitary menstrual products caused rampant infections in a village in Punjab¹¹

Women and schoolgirls living in several villages of Amritsar district still use old rags or socks to manage their periods. These socks or rags are filled with sand, ash or sawdust to make alternatives for sanitary napkins. As reported in *The Times of India*, every single one of the forty-two girls in Nangli, near Amritsar, had vaginal infections.

These were caused not only by the use of dirty menstrual hygiene materials, but also because of open defecation and lack of clean water to clean private parts.

Many of the girls reported that they could not use safe hygiene materials such as pads because they could not afford them. This led to low self-esteem because of which they often dropped out of school.



ACTIVITY

Develop good practices for menstrual hygiene ADOLESCENTS | ADULTS

Based on the case study above, what good practices do you think could be followed here?

Remember your solution must keep economics in mind!

Objective: This activity could be replicated at the school level and involve several stakeholders such as teachers, students and senior school management for World Menstrual Hygiene Day on 28 May every year.



Unsafe menstrual hygiene materials

Now that we have read about safe menstrual hygiene materials, there are several unsafe menstrual hygiene materials that you should know about too.

Many people in India use unsafe menstrual hygiene products like old rags, old socks, husk, ash, banana leaves, mud and soil to absorb menstrual blood. Many women use socks or rags filled with sand, ash or sawdust as an alternative to sanitary materials during their periods. This is not safe and can lead to infections, because the material being used is not sanitary.

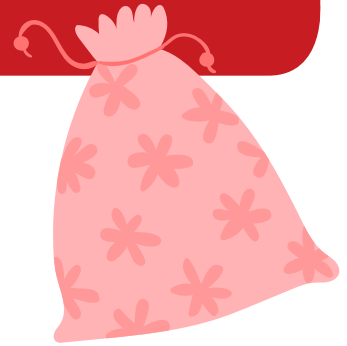
Please do not use such materials as they can expose you to very serious infections. If you are using them or find someone who is using them, please stop (and stop others) immediately. Hygiene is extremely important and using the right materials to manage your periods is central to your overall health.

¹¹ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/sand-filled-old-socks-being-used-as-sanitary-napkins/articleshow/21533049.cms>

I AM ALWAYS READY!

Preparing your own period kit

Now that you know all about the different ways you can track your period and all the hygiene materials you can use, it is important that you be prepared beforehand. Periods can be unexpected but if you are prepared with a period kit, getting your period will not be an unpleasant experience. Here are a few things you will need to keep handy in your period kit:



STEP 1
GET A SMALL BAG OR PURSE

Make sure your bag or purse is big enough to hold your pads/tampons and other materials, and is easy to carry around.

STEP 2
GET YOUR PREFERRED SANITARY PRODUCT

To ensure that you are not caught off guard, get a few pads or tampons and store them in the bag. Make sure you have enough to last you a few days if not a week. Be sure to change your pads or tampons at regular intervals.

STEP 3
ADD PAIN MEDICATION



You may get period cramps. Cramps can be quite painful and it's a good idea to ensure that you have some pain medication just in case you need it. But be careful before taking pain medication and always consult a doctor.

STEP 4
KEEP A SMALL NOTEBOOK/CALENDAR AND A PEN/PENCIL

As we have discussed, keeping track of your periods is important. So why not prepare beforehand and keep a notebook and pencil handy to make a note of the date?

STEP 5
INCLUDE EXTRA UNDERWEAR

Always carry an extra set of underwear in case you stain the one you are wearing. Remember to keep comfortable underwear made of cotton!

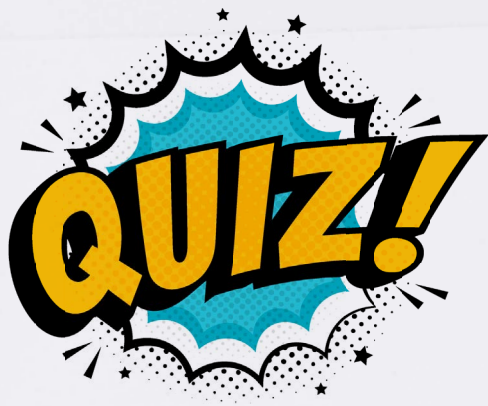
STEP 6
CARRY A COUPLE OF SEALABLE OR PLASTIC BAGS

The bags are to help you store your underwear in case it gets soiled. If bags are not available, use a newspaper.

STEP 7
KEEP SOME HAND SANITIZER OR A SMALL BAR OF SOAP

Keep a small bottle of hand sanitizer or a small bar of soap, which you can use to clean your hands if you don't have easy access to soap in your school washroom. Always remember hygiene is important!





QUIZ!

- 1 Which of the following is a proper way to dispose of a pad?**
 - A. Throw it in the latrine.
 - B. Leave it on the floor of the toilet.
 - C. Throw it unwrapped in the dustbin.
 - D. Wrap it and dispose of it in the dustbin marked for the incinerator.

- 2 How often should someone change their pad?**
 - A. Once a day.
 - B. Once a week.
 - C. Every 48 hours.
 - D. Every 4 hours to 5 hours.

- 3 Which of the following is an unsafe menstrual hygiene practice?**
 - A. Using hay as absorbent material.
 - B. Ensuring you have a clean vulvar area.
 - C. Disposing of your wrapped pad in a dustbin.
 - D. Using soap to clean yourself.

- 4 Which of the following should you not have in your period kit?**
 - A. Pen and paper.
 - B. Extra pads or tampons.
 - C. A bar of soap.
 - D. Dried leaves.

Answers - 1: D | 2: D | 3: A | 4: D



Above: ASHA workers demonstrate how to dispose of used pads, Anganwadi centre, Mogullapalli village, Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh.

Toilet hygiene

Toilet hygiene is crucial to ensuring that you do not risk infections when using the toilet. Maintaining a clean toilet is not only beneficial to your general health but equally important for your menstrual health and hygiene. Unclean or inadequate toilets that are not sterile or do not have adequate water and sanitation can be dangerous for your health as well as the health of others around you. Now, we are going to look at how you can maintain good toilet hygiene for yourself and others.

REMEMBER TO WASH YOUR HANDS WITH SOAP AND WATER

Cleaning your hands with soap and water after using the washroom will help prevent several infections and diseases later on. As your hands

often touch your face, it is very important to keep them clean. Always remember to clean your hands with soap. Soap is a disinfectant that ensures that all the germs on your hands are removed.

ENSURE YOU LEAVE THE TOILET SEAT OR PIT LATRINE CLEAN

After using the toilet, make sure you leave the toilet seat or pit latrine as clean as you found it. Otherwise, you may contract infections. If the seat or latrine is dirty with urine or faeces, ensure that you wash it with water before you leave. Remember to check the seat or the latrine before you use it. If it is not clean, wash it before using it so that you don't contract infections.

REMEMBER TO FLUSH

Always remember to flush after you have used the toilet. If you leave the toilet unflushed, it creates a bad smell that can make the toilet unusable as well as increase the risk of infections.

DISCARD YOUR SANITARY PADS OR TAMPONS IN THE BINS PROVIDED

Ensure that you discard your sanitary pads and tampons in the bins that are provided for this purpose. Simply throwing them on the floor of the toilet or next to the toilet seat will increase the risk of infections.

CHECK THAT YOUR TOILET IS CLEAN BEFORE USING IT

Remember to check the seat or the latrine before you use it. If it is not clean, wash it before using it so that you don't contract infections.

TOILET HYGIENE

- Wash your hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with proper lather.



- Wipe from front to back and wash with adequate amounts of water after urination and bowel movements.
- Keeping toilets clean with toilet sanitizers and disinfectants to keep germs at bay.

Environmental hygiene

Your health and hygiene do not simply depend on your own actions. There are also many structural and infrastructural issues that impact your health and the health of the public at large. Issues that can impact the health of the public are matters of 'environmental hygiene'. While there are several key aspects to environmental hygiene, we are going to discuss three main issues here:

- Access to clean water.
- Access to proper sanitation and ventilation.
- Access to safe toilets.

Access to clean water

Lack of access to clean water can lead to the transmission of several diseases. Even if water is available but improperly managed, water contamination can adversely impact your health. It can lead to the transfer of pathogens that

can lead to the transmission of diseases like diarrhoeal disease, enteric infection, hepatitis A and E, poliomyelitis, helminths, trachoma and adenoviruses (conjunctivitis). Therefore, it is extremely important that you check your school and home to ensure that you receive a clean and adequate supply of water that is not contaminated and cannot be contaminated in the future.

Access to proper sanitation

The word sanitation generally refers to the safe management of human excreta. This can range from access to clean and sanitary toilets to systems that manage solid waste and waste water. It includes clean private and public toilets that prevent open defecation, clean and covered drains and sewers, as well as proper garbage collection, transfer and treatment.

Below: An accessible toilet, Action for Ability Development and Inclusion (AADI) School, Hauz Khas, Delhi.





Check if you have a clean toilet

CHILDREN | ADOLESCENTS | ADULTS

Evaluate the toilets you use – in public, in school and at home. You need to be able to differentiate between a clean and a dirty toilet.

Below are a few pointers that you should keep in mind when evaluating your toilets. Having studied these pointers, identify toilets that are clean and that are dirty. Try and figure out what is missing from toilets that are not clean. What needs to be added to a toilet to make it compatible with Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management (MHHM)?

Privacy is important for a girl to feel comfortable changing her menstrual material.



Objective: One key aspect of health and hygiene is ensuring access to clean and safe toilets. To do so, we all need to know what a clean toilet looks like.



Story time!

ADOLESCENTS | ADULTS

One day, my mother was sick during my period and could not go and buy sanitary pads for me. When my mother asked my father to buy napkins, he refused as he was in a hurry to get to his office. Then, with a lot of hesitation, I asked my brother to buy the napkins and he also refused to go. Finally, my younger sister agreed to buy them for me. But when she reached the shop, my younger sister felt shy to ask the shopkeeper, thinking that he would think she needed them for herself. She also faced comments from the boys around the pharmacy and she got upset and came back home without the napkins.



Here are a few issues that you can discuss when presenting the skit in class:

- Shame related to the development of sexual and reproductive organs.
.....
- Lack of knowledge about the location of health services or the kinds of services offered by them.
.....
- Timings of health clinics do not match the schedules of patients who don't want to miss school and college.
.....
- People worry about privacy and confidentiality in health clinics.
.....
- There are long waiting periods in public health clinics.
.....
- It is difficult to find transportation to reach health clinics, especially in rural areas.
.....
- Attitudinal barriers or judgemental behaviour by nurses and doctors stops patients from visiting health clinics.
.....
- The issue of menstrual health is not discussed openly in families. Traditional gender roles often inhibit these conversations and can therefore prevent access to healthcare.
.....
- Generally, hospitals do not entertain adolescents who come alone. Many clinics have norms that require parents to accompany adolescents and/or to give permission for any procedure or testing.
.....

PART 1

Discuss this story. Some questions you can begin with are:

- Why didn't the girl ask her father directly to buy napkins for her?
.....
- Why did her brother refuse to buy napkins?
.....
- Why did her sister return without buying napkins?
.....



PART 2

Make groups of five and act out the story above. Keep the following in mind:

- Create a real-life environment to suit the storyline.
.....
- Add details for the scene to be acted out.
.....
- Time for reflection – discuss and take time to reflect on the role that you just acted out.
.....

Objective: To discuss factors that impede access to menstrual hygiene materials, and to understand our right to health and hygiene. A basic question to be discussed would be, is hesitation good when using health services?

Hygiene-related diseases

There are three common diseases related to vaginal hygiene: urinary tract infections (UTIs), yeast infections and bacterial vaginosis. These infections are quite common and can adversely impact your personal health. Let's learn about these diseases so that you can consult a doctor if you have any of the symptoms described below.

URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS

Urinary tract infections or UTIs are infections that affect the urinary tract, which includes the bladder, urethra and kidneys. Symptoms that you may experience if you have a UTI are:

- Pain or burning sensation when urinating.
- High fever.
- Pain in the lower stomach or back.
- Needing to urinate suddenly or more frequently.

YEAST INFECTIONS¹²

Yeast infections are fungal infections caused

by an overgrowth of yeast in the vagina. Yeast infections are also called vaginal candidacies.

Symptoms of a yeast infection include:

- Itching and discomfort in the vulva and vaginal region.
- Redness and swelling of the vulva.
- Rashes, pain and soreness.
- Thick, white, odour-free discharge that looks like cottage cheese.

BACTERIAL VAGINOSIS¹³

Bacterial vaginosis is the most common vaginal infection. It occurs when there is an imbalance in the bacteria normally found in the vagina.

Symptoms of bacterial vaginosis include:

- Change in the colour and consistency of your discharge – thin, white, grey or green.
- Burning sensation after urination.
- Itching.

ACTIVITY

Story time!

ADOLESCENTS | ADULTS

**My name is Jhanvi.
I was 12 years old when I started menstruating.
I thought I had dysentery. I was very scared.
I asked my mother why I was bleeding.**

She gave me a bunch of rags and took me to my room. After closing the door behind me, she told me that I had started my periods and that I wouldn't be allowed outside the room. She warned me not to touch anything and not to go to the kitchen or the prayer area at any cost. She also insisted that I stay away from my father and my brother. I felt like what I was going through was wrong and hated myself. The next time I got my period, I kept it a secret. I went about my business as usual as if nothing had happened. However, when my family found out that I was menstruating, they started shouting at me and locked me in my room.



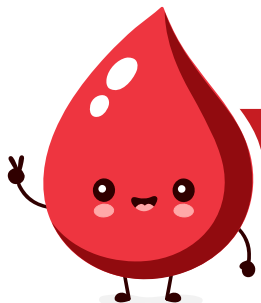
Having read this story, discuss some of the issues it raises:

- Should Jhanvi have felt ashamed because she was menstruating?
.....
- Was it right that Jhanvi was locked in her room during her periods?
.....
- How should Jhanvi's mother have reacted upon finding out about her period?

Objective: This activity highlights the cultural and behavioural attitudes of societies and families regarding menstruation. It seeks to question these norms through the story and the questions that follow.

¹² <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/yeast-infection/symptoms-causes/syc-20378999>

¹³ <https://www.webmd.com/women/guide/what-is-bacterial-vaginosis>



MYTHS & FACTS ABOUT PERIODS

If you are faced with a situation similar to the story above, here is a useful tool that can help you differentiate between the various myths that surround menstruation in India and the actual, scientifically verified facts.

MYTH: Menstruating girls are unclean.

FACT: Menstruation is a natural and healthy process and there is nothing unclean about it.

MYTH: Menstruating girls smell.

FACT: Menstruating girls do not smell. A smell can only occur when a sanitary napkin has been worn for a long time without changing.

MYTH: Girls should not move around during menstruation to avoid lengthening their periods.

FACT: Mobility or moving around has absolutely nothing to do with the length of your periods. As long as you take precautions, don't worry! Feel free to move around.

MYTH: Taking a bath during menstruation can cause infertility.

FACT: Absolutely not! Taking a bath during your period is actually very important for maintaining a clean body. Taking a bath actually prevents infections. Remember hygiene matters!

MYTH: Once a girl has started menstruating, it means she is ready for marriage.

FACT: While menstruation is an important landmark in the growth of a menstruator, it does **not** mean that a girl is now ready of marriage.

MYTH: Menstruating girls should not eat yogurt and vegetables, or drink cold water.

FACT: In fact, as you will find out later, eating a diverse diet filled with fruits, vegetables and yogurt or curd is essential to your health and to ensure that you have smooth periods. Eat iron-rich foods and vegetables to replace the iron that is lost during your periods.

MYTH: Disposal of used sanitary materials by burning or burying leads to infertility.

FACT: Burning your menstrual hygiene products has absolutely nothing to do with infertility. In fact, burning used sanitary materials such as pads is a safe way to dispose of them, but do not try doing this at home. Try and find out how it's done in your locality.

MYTH: Disposal of used sanitary materials in public places may lead to ritual activities that make girls bleed all the time.

FACT: A girl cannot menstruate continuously for life. Most periods last for two days to seven days. Ensure that you dispose of your used materials in a hygienic manner to maintain a clean environment. However, if you experience a very long period, consult a doctor.

MYTH: Food held by someone who is menstruating is contaminated.

FACT: As long as their hands are clean, food that is held or prepared by someone who is menstruating is perfectly fine and not contaminated in any way.

MYTH: Women who have broad shoulders get their periods later.

FACT: There is no link between the broadness of your shoulders and when you will get your periods.



A note for teachers and parents

It is extremely important for teachers to enable students in a classroom to discuss menstruation openly. Talking about this issue and teaching it properly – using proper biological terms, being patient and sympathetic towards students and answering their questions in a straightforward manner – is very important. This will allow students of all genders to comfortably discuss the issue in class and to ask questions that may be deemed awkward.

Teaching this module should not be a one-way lecture. Teachers must foster open discussions, conduct multiple activities and ensure that students engage with each other in a positive way.

If a student stains their uniform, do not make a big deal out of it in class or with other colleagues. Respect a student’s right to privacy and make the child feel comfortable as they will be scared.

Sports teachers should respect the physical growth and privacy of their students. They should not touch students without consent, nor differentiate between girls and boys during the sports period. All sports teachers, whether male or female, should undergo training programmes on MHHM.

The **principal and administration** should ensure that students can access the necessary infrastructure to help them manage their periods. If a child approaches you with an issue in school, take their complaint into account and

address the issue. Ensure that you and your staff are properly trained on MHHM before allowing them to teach it in class. Remember, MHHM is not just a biological phenomenon and needs to be taught with a holistic perspective.

Schools should conduct workshops, demonstrations and training programmes so that their **support staff** is adequately trained to maintain clean premises. Train the support staff on MHHM for their own benefit and also to ensure that they can help girls who may need support.

Parents must be aware of their responsibilities to educate their children, at the appropriate age, about the physical and emotional changes that occur throughout puberty. Parents must educate their children about menstruation and have regular discussions about it. It is very important that both girls and boys are taught about the changes they will go through during puberty. Their bodies should not be a surprise to them!

Some subjects are considered open and others secret based on cultural and social perspectives. Everyone’s values may not be the same. Menstruation is a particularly sensitive issue that needs to be understood. Misinformation, fear, stigma and exclusion result from taboos surrounding menstruation and menstrual hygiene. In creating safe spaces for discussing menstruation and menstrual hygiene, we should consider how we can encourage people to be more open.



Getting comfortable talking about periods

CHILDREN | ADOLESCENTS | ADULTS

Make a chart with sticky notes or pieces of paper torn out of a notebook. Remember that each of the issues on the chart must relate to MHHM.

Your notes should relate to the four topics on the right. Try and elaborate on what you think of each of these subjects.

Objective: This activity should draw on the experiences of all participants. It should help create a supportive space for people to talk about menstruation and menstrual hygiene without inhibition. After discussing common issues around menstrual health and hygiene, students may be able to discuss their own issues and differences in their experiences more openly, and start asking questions about menstruation. This activity could be done in classes on World Menstruation Day on 28 May every year.



Dealing with teasing in class

Often, girls who start menstruating in class face teasing and bullying from their peers. Many girls stay out of school during their periods from fear of such teasing and bullying. Here are a few suggestions for teachers on how to deal with bullying in class:

OPEN COMMUNICATION

Opening channels of communication with students is extremely important. Talking openly about the limits of what is tolerable in class and what isn't is a great way of ensuring that students know quite clearly what the consequences of crossing boundaries will be. It will also help you gain their trust.

INCORPORATE ANTI-BULLYING ACTIVITIES INTO THE CURRICULUM

Reading stories to students and presenting them with realistic scenarios of the impact of bullying and how to prevent it will teach them about the long-term impact of teasing on students.

USE A PEER SYSTEM

Students who have been bullied are often silent and lonely. Help them gain a sense of belonging in the classroom by getting them to spend time with students who are not likely to bully them.

Your
PERIOD
is **NOT** shameful

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

- 'First Period: An MHM Story' (<https://youtu.be/rP29MdVhpCg>).
- 'Hello Periods - The Complete Guide to Periods for Girls' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUNTn1WPEw>).

PERIOD SHAMING

Hey! Did you see?
She has a bloodstain!
Stay away from her!

Disgusting!



Do not
sit here!

You are not
supposed to
come near the
temple when
you have your
period!

Do not
touch the
books!



FACTS

Menstruation is normal. It isn't dirty.

Periods do not have to be shameful.

Don't shy away from talking about menstruation. It is not inappropriate.



Eating right

3

Eating right

Learning objectives



CHILDREN

Age: Below 10 years

- Understand the components of a balanced diet.
- Understand the various food groups and the foods that provide certain nutrients.



ADOLESCENTS

Age: 11 years - 18 years

- Understand the impact of an unbalanced diet on the menstrual cycle.
- Differentiate between myths and facts on the relationship between nutrition and menstruation.



ADULTS

Age: 18+ years

- Able to understand and differentiate between various eating disorders.
- Understand the impact of eating disorders on menstrual health.

Below: Wall painting of good nutrition, Rajkiya Kanya Inter College, Rampur, Uttar Pradesh.



A plethora on my plate: a balanced diet

The quality of the food that we eat can directly impact our health. Eating the right kind of food can help prevent certain illnesses, reduce the risk of contracting certain diseases and aid in recovery from others. Therefore, it is essential that you not only understand what constitutes a balanced and nutritious diet, but think about the food you eat and ask your caregivers for a more nutritious diet. Nutritious food does not have to be expensive. More often than not, naturally grown fruits and locally available vegetables can form a balanced diet.

Now that you are or will soon be an adolescent, your body's nutritional requirements are going to change. Ensuring you get the nutrients you need will help prevent many problems that could arise at a later date. In fact, an unbalanced diet will not just impact you at later stages in life, it could also impact you right now. For example, the loss of iron due to menstruation can cause anaemia, a very serious disease. However, if you eat the right vegetables and fruits, you can avoid these problems.

Let us now look at the components of a balanced diet.

COMPONENTS OF A BALANCED DIET



A balanced diet, as the name suggests, has adequate proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, minerals, dietary fibres and water. Each and every one of these nutrients plays an important role in your body.

There are five key categories of foods that you should keep in mind. These are:

Grains: Grains include wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley and other cereals. Foods made of grains include: whole wheat bread, brown rice and oatmeal.

Vegetables: Make sure you eat a variety of vegetables, including dark green, red and orange vegetables, legumes (peas and beans) and starchy vegetables. Green leafy vegetables, peas, broccoli, carrots and tomatoes are rich in iron and multiple

vitamins, and should be consumed regularly.

Fruits: Fruits and juice made of fresh fruit are an important category of food. You can buy fresh, canned, frozen or dried fruits, which can be eaten cut up, whole or pureed. Low glycaemic options include cherries, berries, grapefruit, pears and green apples. Papaya increases heat in the body and provides carotene. Dates and dry fruits are also a good option.

Dairy: Dairy products and foods made from milk are considered part of this food group. Choose products that are fat-free or low-fat, as well as those that are calcium-rich.

Protein: Go lean on protein. Buy low-fat and lean meats and poultry. Vary your protein intake by eating more fish, nuts, seeds, peas and beans.



ACTIVITY

Evaluate your plate

CHILDREN | ADOLESCENTS | ADULTS

Now that you know what makes a balanced diet, you should also look at your own lunch at school (whether you are carrying your own lunch or the meal provided to you at school) and try and understand its nutritional balance. Using the infographic on the previous page, build your own food pyramid based on the vegetables available in your region and figure out which nutrients are on your plate and which are not!

Note down the different components of your lunch. These could be *dal*, rice, *sambhar*, vegetables, *idli*, meat, etc.

Now classify these items into various food groups: grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy and protein.

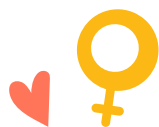
Having classified your food, compare your plate to the nutritional pyramid you have made and look at what you're missing. Maybe have more of those nutrients for your next meal!



Right: Students on a tiffin break, Mini Gurukulam School, Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh.

Objective: To understand the basics of nutrition, and learn about essential nutrients and their sources.

Right: A balanced and nutritious mid-day meal, Government High School, Goonipalayam village, Tiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu.



Ensure that you get enough iron in your diet. Menstruation reduces iron levels in women and can lead to anaemia.

Balanced diets for healthy menstruation

The food that you eat impacts your menstrual cycle. A healthy diet is key to ensuring that you have a healthy menstrual cycle and can reduce symptoms of premenstrual disorders and thus allow for a smoother period. Let us now look at a few specific things you need to keep in mind when preparing your meals.

Getting irritable during your periods is quite normal and common. Adjusting your diet can help you deal with managing your body during your periods.

If you feel drained out and experience low energy levels, add food to your diet that fuels your body. Leafy vegetables, cereals, nuts, *amla*, sprouts and eggs will help reduce fatigue. Choose from the leafy vegetables and cereals that are available in your local area!

One key thing to keep in mind is to ensure that you get enough iron in your diet. Menstruation reduces iron levels in women and can lead to anaemia. Ensuring you receive enough iron and vitamin B12 is essential. To do so, eat a lot

of beans, nuts, whole grains, leafy vegetables, cottage cheese (*paneer*), raisins (*kishmis*), red meat, fish, milk and cheese.

Cutting down on sodium can help deal with bloating during your period. Fibre-rich fruits, fish, peanuts and almonds are all excellent sources of omega-3. Increase the amount of turmeric, cardamom, ginger, coriander and cumin in your diet – these are anti-inflammatory spices and make your food a whole lot tastier.

As you reach the end of your menstrual cycle, your appetite is likely to reduce, so you could consume smaller portions of food as and when you feel hungry. But remember, you need to eat all the nutrients! Foods like spinach are a good source of calcium and important at this stage of your cycle.

While all these foods are nutritious, keep in mind that certain kinds of foods are not a good idea. Highly processed foods that are high in sodium or sugar are not good for your health and you should consume them as little as possible.



ACTIVITY

Story time!

ADOLESCENTS | ADULTS



Sujata lives with her mother in her grandmother's house in Patna. Her mother works hard and manages two meals a day. Their meals consist mainly of potatoes and rice. Sujata hardly gets a diet rich in nutrients and dairy products. Her diet consists largely of carbohydrates. She lacks a protein-rich diet during her adolescent years. She looks pale, thin and underdeveloped compared to her classmates. She often complains about cramps and pain in the lower abdomen, and is exhausted easily. Her menarche was delayed by four years and her body did not grow well during puberty. She started menstruating when she was 17 years old. Now, during her menstruation, she faces many problems. She had irregular periods followed by intense pain in the lower abdomen, irritability,

cramps, headache and nausea. She was advised by a social worker, Didi, to visit the adolescent health centre and share her problems with the doctor. Didi also advised her mother and school to provide her with a nutrient-rich diet to avoid disturbances in the body caused by an imbalanced diet. Instead of being calm and managing her periods, Sujata gets frightened every month during her menstruation.

.....

Now that you have read this story, let's think about a few things:

- How could her grandmother fix Sujata's diet?
- What do you think of your own diet, having read this story?
- Make a nutrient pyramid based on the grains and foods available in your region.

Objective: To encourage thinking and discussion about the importance of a nutrient-rich diet for adolescents who may experience menstruation-related health issues.

The impact of nutritional deficiencies

Not having a healthy diet can cause serious problems to your health. An imbalance of nutrients in your body can lead to problems such as irregular periods, anaemia and other menstrual problems for girls. As a responsible individual, you should be informed about the problems that your diet can cause. So let's take a look at the most important nutrients and how your menstrual cycle is affected if they are missing from your diet.

IRON

As you grow older, your body also grows in size. The rapid growth of your body increases your blood volume and muscle mass, so you require more oxygen. Iron is a key nutrient that helps to create haemoglobin, which transports oxygen via the blood to all parts of your body and helps with your body's energy requirements.

When you menstruate, you lose blood. This also means that your body loses some of the essential iron it needs to keep you healthy. A lack of iron in your diet can lead to anaemia, which is a serious global health concern.

CALCIUM

Another key nutrient your body will need is calcium. As your bones grow bigger, your body

will require more calcium so that your bones grow stronger as well. Girls with higher calcium intake are less likely to experience mood swings and fatigue before their periods. Calcium also helps your body absorb vitamin D and reduces the risk of your developing premenstrual syndromes.

FOLATE¹⁴

Folate, folic acid or vitamin B9 is another crucial component of your diet. It is a naturally occurring vitamin found in green leafy vegetables, citrus fruits and beans. Folate helps your tissues grow, helps to create new proteins, and helps in the formation of red blood cells, which can help prevent anaemia.

Zinc is a key nutrient that ensures your body grows properly. However, nutrients like zinc should not be taken in excessive amounts and you should consult your doctor before taking any zinc supplements. Zinc can also help relieve menstrual pain and cramping.

Now that we have looked at these key nutrients, let us see how a lack of these nutrients can affect your body. The most serious of these consequences is anaemia.

ANAEMIA

While anaemia has already come up several times in this module, it is very important that you understand what this is and how it can impact your body.

Anaemia is a serious health issue by which the number of red blood cells in your body, or the haemoglobin concentration in them, drops below normal. As we have said before, your blood requires red blood cells to carry oxygen to all parts of your body. As you grow older, you will require more oxygen to enable the growth of your body. Lack of haemoglobin in your blood can result in symptoms such as fatigue, weakness, dizziness and shortness of breath. If you are experiencing these symptoms, then you should consult your doctor.

¹⁴ <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002408.htm>

¹⁵ <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/iron-deficiency-anaemia/>

If anaemia caused by iron deficiency is left untreated, it leaves you at risk of more serious infections because a lack of iron can affect your immune system. Further, it can increase the risk of your developing complications that affect your heart and lungs. For pregnant women, it can cause a greater risk of complications before and after childbirth.¹⁵

Anaemia is most commonly caused by lack of iron in your diet but deficiencies in folate, vitamin B12 and vitamin A are also important causes of anaemia.

ANAEMIA RATES IN INDIA

According to the National Family Health Survey 2019-21 (NFHS-5), West Bengal and Gujarat have the highest rates of anaemia, with Gujarat having a prevalence of 80 per cent in children aged 6 months to 59 months.

Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana and Telangana are other major anaemia-prevalent states, with a 70 per cent prevalence among children. Assam has experienced the greatest increase in anaemia-prevalence, rising from 35.7 per cent to 68.4 per cent.

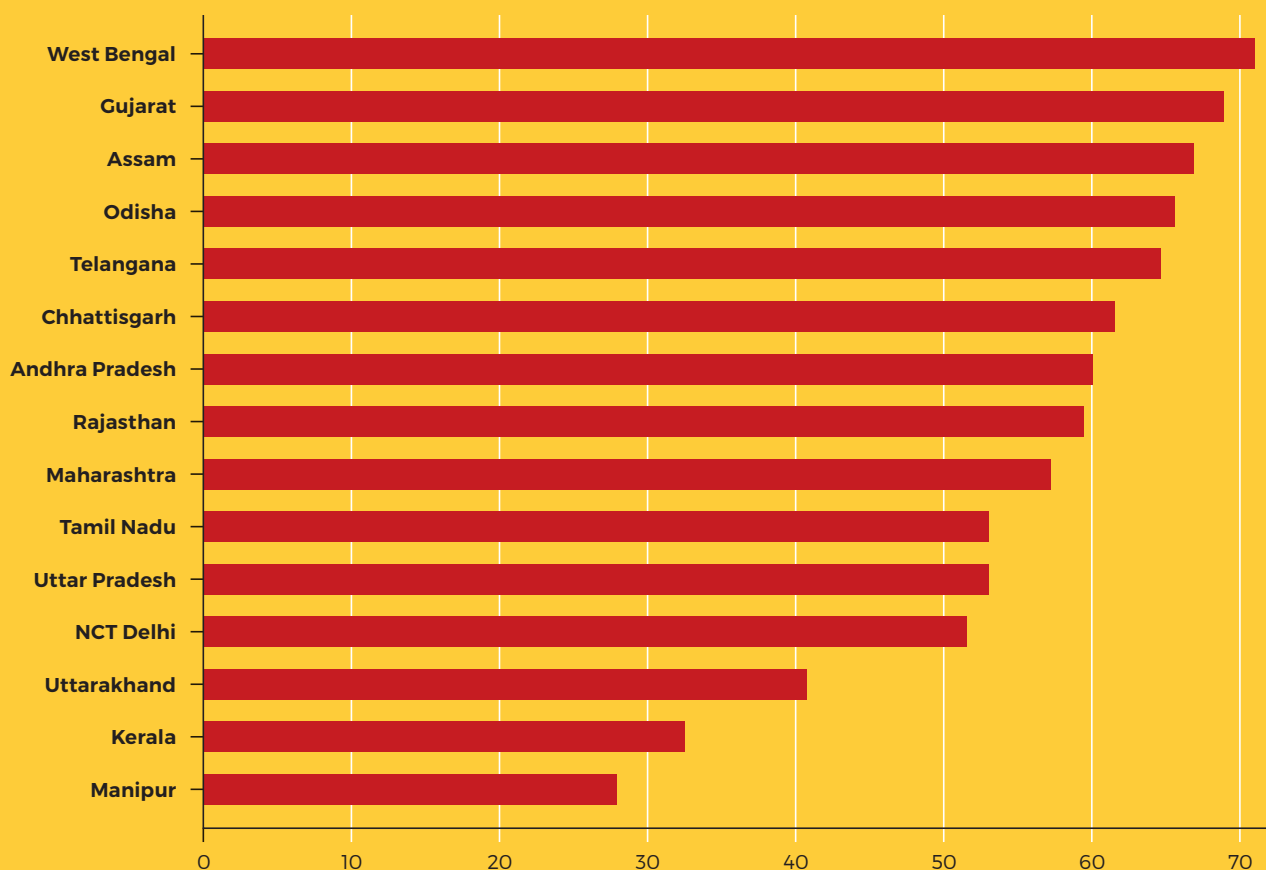
Mizoram and Chhattisgarh are two other states that have seen a 25 per cent increase.

Only four states, Uttarakhand (by 1 per cent), Jharkhand (by 2.4 per cent), Meghalaya (by 2.9 per cent) and Haryana (by 1.3 per cent) reported a decrease in anaemia prevalence rates.

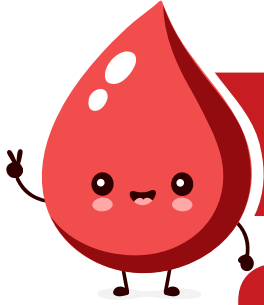
Over 60 per cent of pregnant women in Bihar, Gujarat, West Bengal, Odisha and Tripura were anaemic.



Prevalence of anaemia among adolescent women (15 years to 19 years) (NFHS-5)



Source: <https://factly.in/data-nfhs-5-findings-reveal-increase-in-anaemia-prevalence-in-children-women-across-most-states/>



MYTHS & FACTS ABOUT MENSTRUATION AND NUTRITION

MYTH: There is no correlation between nutrition and the menstrual cycle.

FACT: Nutritious food is essential to ensure that your hormones work properly and you have a smooth menstrual cycle.

MYTH: Eating sour foods will worsen menstrual cramps.

FACT: There no relation between consuming sour foods and menstrual cramps.

MYTH: Drinking cranberry juice cures urinary tract infections (UTIs).

FACT: Drinking cranberry juice can reduce the risk of contracting UTIs, but if you already have a UTI or are experiencing symptoms, then please consult a doctor.

MYTH: Menstruating women emit certain rays that can turn preserved food bad.

FACT: There is no factual correlation between the two. It is a superstition and a menstrual taboo.

MYTH: Eating excessive sweets can lead to excessive menstruation.

FACT: No. A small amount of sugar in your diet is fine and can help keep energy levels up but do not overindulge.

MYTH: Sesame seeds are bad for menstruating girls.

FACT: Actually, sesame seeds are very good for your body and can even help with blood flow, etc.¹⁶



ACTIVITY

What would you do?

ADOLESCENTS

Lavanya is 15 years old. She loves going to school and meeting her friends. However, every month, when she starts her period, her mother doesn't allow her to go to school. This means that Lavanya misses classes and does not get to spend time with her friends. Moreover, it isn't only her mobility that is restricted. During her periods, Lavanya isn't allowed to eat curds or sweets and

her diet is severely restricted. Her mother says that eating pickles and sweets can be harmful.

.....
Imagine if you were Lavanya, would you challenge your mother if she restricted you diet?

If no, why?

If yes, how

Objective: To help students situate themselves in and think through a complex cultural and attitudinal issue that may be prevalent in several households. To help them think critically about and challenge these social norms.

¹⁶ <https://www.netmeds.com/health-library/post/amazing-uses-health-and-nutritional-benefits-of-sesame-seeds-and-oil>

Eating disorders

Eating disorders can affect anybody but usually begin during our teenage years. Such disorders have affected millions of adolescents and young adults globally. Eating disorders must be taken seriously as they have a major impact on your health, including your menstrual cycle. There are three eating disorders that you should know about.

1 ANOREXIA NERVOSA

Anorexia nervosa is a debilitating disorder in which people take extreme steps to avoid eating at all to the point of starving themselves. They may become abnormally thin but still feel they are fat. They continue in this way because they have a distorted image of themselves.

Signs of anorexia nervosa may include:

- A distorted image of one's self.
- Leaving or hiding food.
- Counting the calories in one's diet.
- Refusing to admit feelings of hunger.
- Excessive exercise.
- Obvious emotional changes such as irritability, depression and anxiety.

Physical signs of anorexia nervosa include:

- Rapid or excessive weight loss.
- Feeling cold, tired and weak.
- Thinning hair.
- Absence of menstrual cycles in females.
- Dizziness.

2 BULIMIA NERVOSA

Adolescents with bulimia nervosa typically binge/overeat and then purge/remove/clean. This cycle involves indulging in uncontrollable episodes of overeating (bingeing) followed by compensatory 'cleaning' behaviour such as vomiting, use of laxatives, fasting or excessive exercise.

Physical signs of bulimia nervosa include:

- Discoloured teeth.
- Odour on the breath.
- Stomach pain.
- Irregular or absent menstrual periods.
- Weakness/nausea.

3 BINGE EATING DISORDER

Binge eating disorder is characterized by uncontrollable, excessive eating followed by feelings of shame and guilt. Teenagers with binge eating disorder may feel like they have no control over their behaviour and eat in secret when they are not hungry.

Signs of binge eating disorder may include:

- Eating an unusually large amount of food in a short period of time (within 2 hours).
- Hiding food.
- Eating in secret because of feeling embarrassed by how much one is eating.
- Eating when stressed or when feeling uncertain about how to cope.
- Feeling that one is unable to control how much one eats and being shocked with oneself afterwards.
- Experimentation with different diets.

Physical signs of binge eating disorder include:

- Weight gain.
- Irregular menstrual cycle.



How eating disorders can impact your menstrual health

You may not immediately realize the link, but the eating disorders mentioned above can impact your menstrual health. According to a study on 'Binge eating and menstrual dysfunction' (Algars et al., 2014), women who reported lifetime binge eating were more likely to report amenorrhoea or oligomenorrhoea (absent or infrequent menstruation) than women who reported no binge eating.

There are several metabolic and endocrinological factors that could underlie this association. The same study found that oligomenorrhoea (infrequent menstruation) occurs in about half the girls and women with bulimia nervosa, and obesity is a factor in menstrual irregularities. This can be due to improper nutritional inputs to the body and metabolic disturbances in the body.



What would you do?

ADOLESCENTS

Joy has been taunted her entire life for her weight. Often, her friends and parents would tease her for eating. As an adolescent girl, she started to feel more insecure about her body. She began to starve herself and not eat at all. Every day, she would exercise for hours. She became insecure about her body image and began to look for ways to reduce her weight obsessively, so much so that she became dangerously underweight. With her increasing concern about growing fat, she started skipping two meals a day and, by the time she was in Class 10, Joy would eat only one meal and salads. Over the next 6 months to 7 months, she lost about

12 kilograms. She looked thin but would find herself fat in front of the mirror. This led to symptoms of menstrual irregularity.

Having read this story, let's think about the impact of this kind of behaviour:

- How would you help a friend going through a similar situation?
- Having learned how inadequate nutrition can impact menstrual health, can you list the ways in which not eating properly could impact Joy's menstrual health?

Objective: To encourage thinking and discussion about the negative impacts of body shaming and eating disorders, particularly with relation to menstrual health.



True or false?

MENSTRUATORS OF ALL AGE GROUPS

Read the following sentences carefully and tick 'true' or 'false':

- T F Eating a balanced diet has no impact on my periods.
- T F I should stop myself from eating sour foods during my periods.
- T F I shouldn't touch food when I am menstruating because it could go bad.
- T F Keeping small amounts of sugar in my diet does not harm my periods.

Objective: To be able to identify cultural taboos and practices related to menstruation.



QUIZ!

- 1** Which of the following are key elements of your diet?
 - A. Carbohydrates.
 - B. Vitamins.
 - C. Iron.
 - D. Folate.
 - E. All of the above.

- 2** Which of the following is not an eating disorder?
 - A. Anorexia nervosa.
 - B. Bulimia nervosa.
 - C. Binge eating disorder.
 - D. Egress nervosa.

- 3** The lack of which of the following does not cause of anaemia?
 - A. Iron.
 - B. Fats.
 - C. Vitamin B-12.
 - D. Folate.

- 4** Which of the following is not a source of calcium?
 - A. Milk.
 - B. Cheese.
 - C. Curd.
 - D. Potato.

Answers - 1: E | 2: D | 3: B | 4: D



**A holistic
view of
health**

4

A holistic view of health

Learning objectives



CHILDREN

Age: Below 10 years

- Understand what counts as personal health and its various aspects.
- Understand the importance of personal as well as mental health.



ADOLESCENTS

Age: 11 years - 18 years

- Understand what counts as menstrual health and its various components.
- Understand the right to healthcare and what it entails.




ADULTS

Age: 18+ years

- Able to speak up about personal healthcare issues.
- Understand the various disorders associated with menstrual health and how these impact the body.

Below: Yoga at the Kala Sanskriti Foundation in Mumbai, Maharashtra.





A holistic idea of health isn't limited to the physical body but also includes the mind.



What counts as personal health?

To count as healthy, you must take care of two major aspects of your health: your physical health as well as your mental and emotional health. While most people tend to focus on the key aspects of their physical health – hygiene, nutrition, exercise, etc. – a holistic idea of health isn't limited to the physical body but also includes the mind. Caring for your body is an essential part of growing up, but you also have to understand and respect your feelings as well as the feelings of others, manage your emotions and maintain healthy and respectful relationships with others (Stoewen, 2017).

While we have already discussed several aspects of personal health such as hygiene and nutrition, mental well-being is also of paramount importance. This chapter is a small tool developed by UNESCO to help you deal with your mental health, have healthy conversations on issues regarding mental health, and help others

with mental health problems. To be healthy is to live more fully, to have the necessary tools to be able to excel and achieve your potential.

CHANNELLING ENERGY IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION!

To channel their hormonal energy during puberty, adolescents could be more active in sports, play regular games and take part in extracurricular activities in school rather than focus only on academics. Regular physical activities can help with the sudden mix of hormones in the body, and use them in ways that are productive. More physical activity can regulate testosterone and thus reduce the chance of experiencing higher levels of aggression and mood swings.

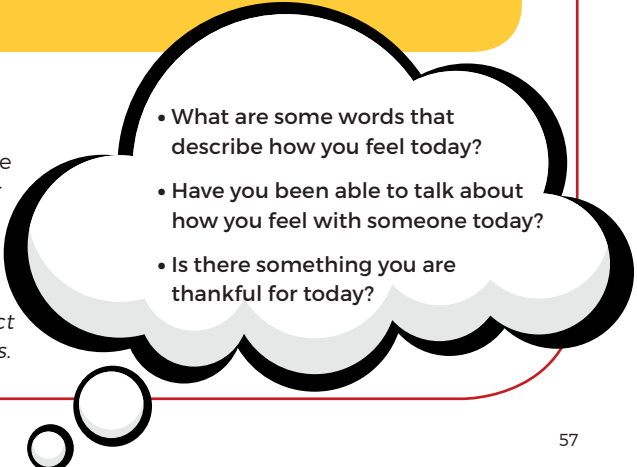


ACTIVITY

How I'm feeling

Think about these questions and write your answers in your notebook. These are only sample questions, feel free to add to them or change them.

Objective: To help students introspect and become attuned to their feelings.

- 
- What are some words that describe how you feel today?
 - Have you been able to talk about how you feel with someone today?
 - Is there something you are thankful for today?

Menstrual health

If not properly managed, your menstrual health can impact both your physical and your mental health. In 'Menstrual health: a definition for policy, practice, and research', Hennegan et al. (2021) offer a definition that covers several key areas related to menstrual health:

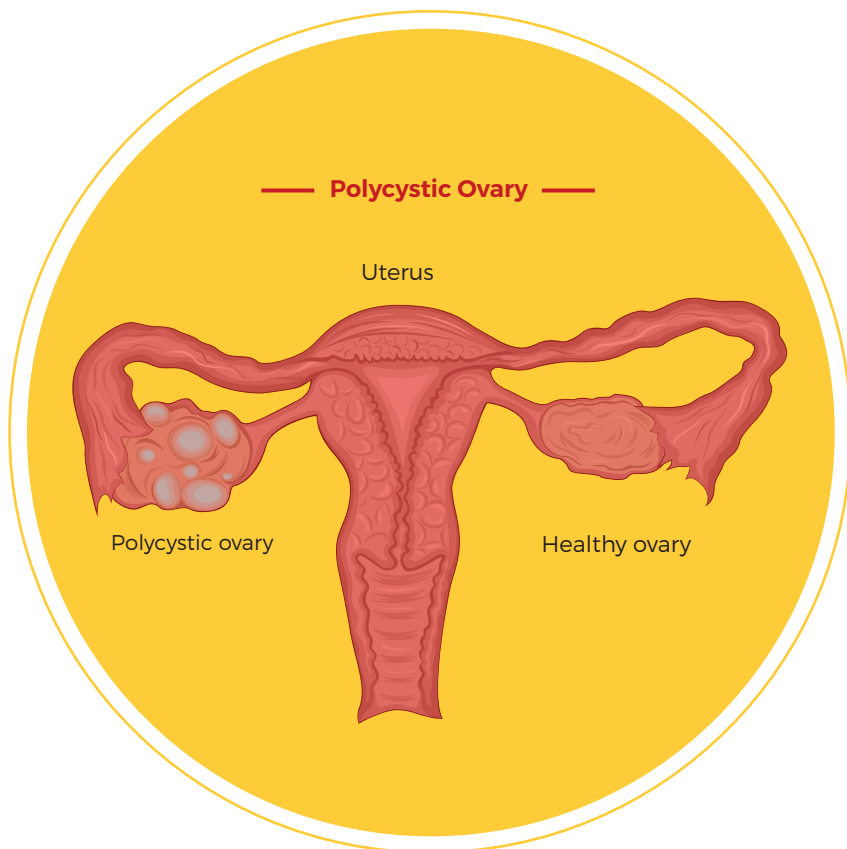


Menstrual health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, about the menstrual cycle. Achieving menstrual health implies that women, girls, and all other people who experience a menstrual cycle, throughout their life-course, can:

- Access accurate, timely, age-appropriate information about the menstrual cycle, menstruation, and changes experienced throughout the life-course, as well as related self-care and hygiene practices.
- Care for their bodies during menstruation such that their preferences, hygiene, comfort, privacy, and safety are supported. This includes accessing and using effective and affordable menstrual materials and having supportive

facilities and services, including water, sanitation, and hygiene services, for washing the body and hands, changing menstrual materials, and cleaning and/or disposing of used materials.

- Access timely diagnosis, treatment, and care for menstrual cycle-related discomforts and disorders, including access to appropriate health services and resources, pain relief, and strategies for self-care.
- Experience a positive and respectful environment about the menstrual cycle, free from stigma and psychological distress, including the resources and support they need to confidently care for their bodies and make informed decisions about self-care throughout their menstrual cycle.
- Decide whether and how to participate in all spheres of life, including civil, cultural, economic, social, and political, during all phases of the menstrual cycle, free from menstrual-related exclusion, restriction, discrimination, coercion, and/or violence.



Disorders that can impact your menstrual health

POLYCYSTIC OVARIAN DISEASE

As we have discussed, girls and women have two ovaries that release an egg alternatively every month. Polycystic ovarian disease (PCOD) is a condition whereby the ovaries release multiple eggs that are immature or partially mature, which can turn into cysts. This causes the ovaries to become enlarged and secrete large amounts of androgens that can cause painful periods and affect your body.

POLYCYSTIC OVARIAN SYNDROME

Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), also called Stein-Leventhal syndrome, is caused when the ovaries produce more androgen than usual. This interferes with the development and release of eggs. These eggs develop into cysts that grow in the ovaries instead of being released during ovulation, and can even get enlarged. Over time, if left untreated, PCOS can lead to serious health problems.

Symptoms of PCOD and PCOS¹⁷

- Weight loss.
- Irregular, missed, heavy or light menstrual periods.
- Increased risk of mental health issues/disorders.
- Hirsutism (excessive hair on face, body).
- Weight gain around the belly area, difficulty in losing it.
- Acne/oily skin.
- Male-pattern baldness or thinning hair.
- Infertility.
- Small pieces of excess skin on the neck or armpits (skin tags).
- Dark or thick skin patches on the back of the neck, in the armpits and under the breasts.

What is the difference between PCOD and PCOS?¹⁸

PCOS is a disorder of the endocrine system while PCOD is a condition developed by the imbalance of hormones. PCOD is more common than PCOS. Remember, if you experience any of these symptoms, consult a doctor immediately!

PREMENSTRUAL DYSPHORIC DISORDER

Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) is a more severe form of premenstrual syndrome (PMS). Its exact causes are unknown, but the hormonal changes associated with menstruation can lead to serotonin deficiency. Serotonin is a substance found in the brain and intestines that narrows blood vessels and can affect your mood.

If you have a family history of PMS, then you are at a higher risk of developing PMDD.

Symptoms of PMDD¹⁹

Symptoms of PMDD appear during the week before menstruation and end within a few days of your period starting. These symptoms can be so severe that they disrupt your daily life. Some common symptoms include:

- Abdominal cramps.
- Bloating.
- Constipation.
- Nausea.
- Severe fatigue.
- Anxiety.
- Confusion.
- Pelvic heaviness or pressure.

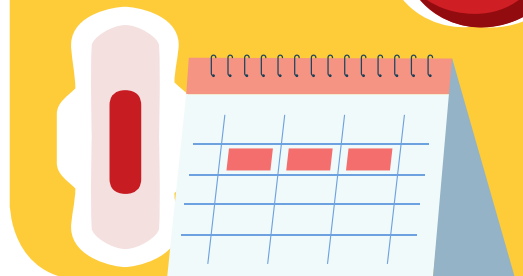
If you experience any of these symptoms, please consult a doctor.

POLYMENORRHOEA²⁰

If your menstrual cycle lasts less than 21 days then you may have polymenorrhoea. A normal

POLYMENORRHOEA

A condition in which the menstrual cycle is shorter than 21 days.



menstrual cycle lasts between 24 days and 38 days. While some may experience regular menstrual cycles that are shorter than average, for others a short cycle may be caused by medical conditions. If you have polymenorrhoea, then your periods may be irregular or unpredictable.

OLIGOMENORRHOEA²¹

Oligomenorrhoea is a condition whereby you experience infrequent menstrual periods. It generally occurs in women of childbearing age. While your menstrual cycle may vary from time to time, if you regularly go more than 35 days without menstruating, then you may be diagnosed with oligomenorrhoea.

Some causes of oligomenorrhoea

- Most commonly, oligomenorrhoea is a side effect of birth control.
- Eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia.
- Diabetes or thyroid problems.

DYSMENORRHOEA²²

If you have severe and frequent cramps during your periods, you may have dysmenorrhoea. The abnormal contractions of the uterus may be due to a chemical imbalance in the body. There are two types of dysmenorrhoea:

Primary dysmenorrhoea

This begins with the first period and continues throughout a lifetime. Primary dysmenorrhoea can cause severe and frequent menstrual cramping from severe and abnormal uterine contractions.

Secondary dysmenorrhoea

This can have a physical cause and starts later in life. It may occur due to another medical condition such as pelvic inflammatory disease or endometriosis.

¹⁷ <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/polycystic-ovary-syndrome-pcos>; Brutocao et al., 2018.

¹⁸ <https://www.apollocradle.com/what-is-difference-between-pcod-vs-pcos/>

¹⁹ <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/premenstrual-dysphoric-disorder-pmdd>

²⁰ <https://www.healthline.com/health/polymenorrhea#:~:text=Polymenorrhea%20is%20a%20term%20used,form%20of%20abnormal%20uterine%20bleeding>

²¹ <https://www.healthline.com/health/oligomenorrhea#treatments>

²² <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/dysmenorrhea>

Symptoms of dysmenorrhoea

- Cramping or pain in the lower abdomen.
- Lower back pain.
- Pain radiating down the leg.
- Nausea.
- Vomiting.

AMENORRHOEA²³

Amenorrhoea is the medical term for the absence of periods. It is not a disease but may be a symptom of another condition. There are two types of amenorrhoea:

Primary amenorrhoea: If you have reached the age of 16 and haven't had a period, then you may have primary amenorrhoea.

Secondary amenorrhoea: If you started your periods but miss your period for more than three menstrual cycles (without being pregnant) then you may have secondary amenorrhoea.

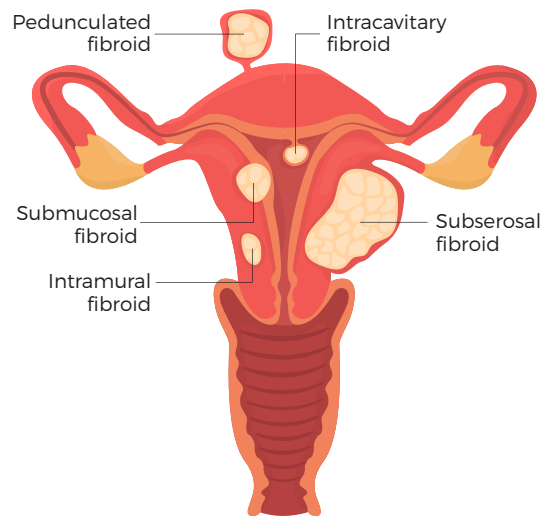
FIBROIDS²⁴

Fibroids are growths made of muscle and fibrous tissue that develop around the uterus. Most fibroids are asymptomatic and therefore you may not know if you have fibroids.

Symptoms of fibroids

- Heavy periods.
- Abdominal pain.
- Lower back pain.
- Frequent urination.
- Constipation.

Uterine Fibroids



MENORRHAGIA

If your period lasts more than 7 days and you experience very heavy flow of blood, then you may have menorrhagia. Untreated menorrhagia can be quite dangerous and cause anaemia. Menorrhagia can be caused by uterine or hormone-related problems.

Symptoms of menorrhagia

- Having to change your pad every 2 hours.
- Passing clots that are unusually large in size.
- Having periods that lasts more than 7 days.
- Having constant pain in your lower stomach during your menstrual periods.
- Feeling tired or short of breath and lacking energy.

Accessing healthcare services

Sometimes, when you have a problem that affects you sexual or reproductive organs, you may hesitate in talking to your parents about it or accessing healthcare services from fear or shame. You may worry about your privacy and confidentiality being violated at medical clinics or hospitals. These are common issues that prevent young adults and adolescents from accessing the healthcare services that they need. Do not hesitate to talk about menstruation-related problems. Menstruation is normal and natural. Don't shy away from taking about it and feel free to address it.

Menstruation is still a taboo subject due to lack of scientific knowledge. However, there should be more self-awareness and engagement

in spreading awareness about issues like menstruation, reproduction and other such subjects.

But what do you do if your parents don't take your healthcare needs seriously? Your parents are probably busy with their work and other such commitments, which may be a reason why your needs go unnoticed. Another reason could be lack of knowledge about health issues. Educate your parents and discuss the importance of the healthcare needs of the whole family.

- Normalize terms like period, period stain, menstruation, sex and reproduction.
- Sex education should be a must for teens and adults.

²³ <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/amenorrhea>

²⁴ <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/fibroids/>

²⁵ <https://www.ndtv.com/health/6-yoga-poses-to-relieve-women-of-menstrual-cramps-1871669>; <https://www.india.com/lifestyle/regulate-your-periods-with-yoga-5-yoga-asanas-to-regulate-your-irregular-menstrual-cycle-naturally-2134061/>

YOGA FOR MENSTRUATION²⁵

Along with other light physical exercise, some yoga poses can also help you deal with menstrual cramps, while also giving you the exercise you need for the day!

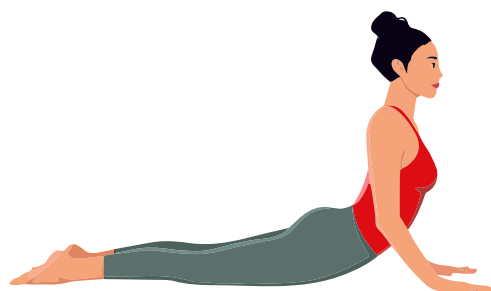


— Dhanurasana (bow pose) —

- Lie down on your stomach.
- Inhale and bend your legs backwards.
- Stretch your arms backwards and hold on to your ankles.
- Hold the position for a few seconds.

— Ustrasana (camel pose) —

- Kneel down on the floor.
- Make sure your shoulders and knees are aligned.
- Bend backwards and hold your heels.
- Push your hips forward and drop your head back.

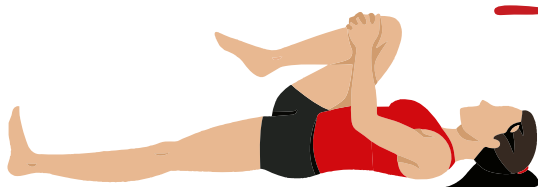


— Bhujangasana (cobra pose) —

- Lie down on your stomach.
- Keep your legs together and your palms facing the ground next to your head.
- Inhale and raise your upper body.
- Stretch your neck as much as possible.
- Hold the position for a few seconds.

— Balasana (child's pose) —

- Sit on your knees.
- Inhale and bend forward so that your body rests on your thighs.
- Stretch your arms in front of you.
- Hold the position for a few seconds.



— Apanasana (knees-to-chest pose) —

- Lie down on your back.
- Inhale and lift one knee to your chest with your hand wrapped around the knee. Keep the other leg extended.
- Do this one leg at a time.

QUIZ!

- 1** Which of the following are symptoms of PCOD and PCOS?
 - A. Pelvic pain.
 - B. Weight gain.
 - C. Depression or mood swings.
 - D. Breathing problems while sleeping.
 - E. All of the above.

- 2** Which of the following are not disorders that impacts your menstrual health?
 - A. Oligomenorrhoea.
 - B. Dysmenorrhoea.
 - C. Amenorrhoea.
 - D. Pyromenorrhoea.

- 3** Which of the following are not yoga poses that help improve physical health for better menstruation?
 - A. Bhujangasana (cobra pose).
 - B. Ustrasana (camel pose).
 - C. Apanasana (knees-to-chest pose).
 - D. Prasarita padottanasa (standing wide legged forward fold).

Answers - 1: E | 2: D | 3: D

NOTE FOR TEACHERS

Teachers should keep a careful eye on the mental health of children in class. If a child is behaving differently than usual, if they are not socializing as they used to, if they are not eating properly, then a conversation with their parents on the child’s mental health is advisable.

Teachers should be aware of any health-related issues among the children in their class. They should speak to parents and

ensure that students on medication are able to receive the medicines they require at the right time.

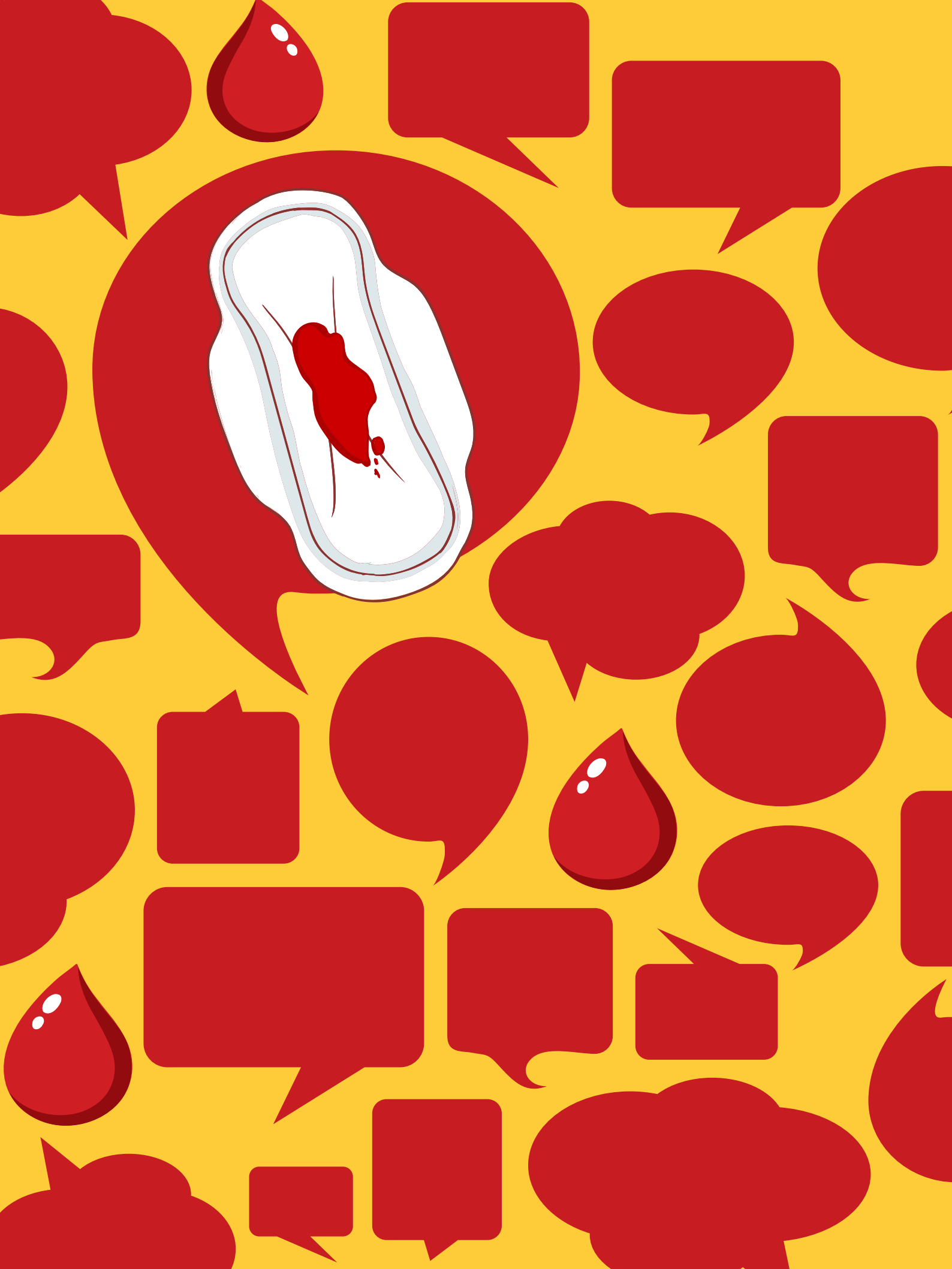
Teachers should also encourage students to take part in some physical activity every day. Whether it is through the morning assembly or before class begins, make sure that students are not stuck sitting on the floor or on the chair for long periods of time.

MENSTRUAL HEALTH, NUTRITION AND HYGIENE CHECKLIST

Now that you know all about maintaining your hygiene, let’s go through a simple checklist. This checklist is to help you, your parents, your teachers and others ensure

that you are healthy and maintain proper hygiene, not just for yourself but also for your environment. Remember, you are in charge of your own health and hygiene!

- Y N Do I have regular periods?
.....
- Y N Was I aware of all the aspects of menstruation before I got my first period?
.....
- Y N Do I have access to clean menstrual hygiene materials?
.....
- Y N Do I have access to menstrual hygiene materials that can last the duration of my entire period?
.....
- Y N Am I able to confidently talk to other members of my family about menstruation?
.....
- Y N Do I have access to a clean toilet? Remember to check all aspects of the toilet, including your privacy.
.....
- Y N Do I have access to soap in my toilet?
.....
- Y N If required, can I access appropriate healthcare services?
.....
- Y N Am I consuming a healthy and balanced diet?
.....
- Y N Are both boys and girls taught about puberty and menstruation in my class?
.....
- Y N Is World Menstruation Day celebrated in my school?



CHAPTER

5

Way forward

5

Way forward



Way forward for teachers

Develop a clear idea of how to discuss menstruation in class. Often, these chapters are skipped in class or simply taught as a lecture. Rather, develop a clear plan of how to address nutrition, health and hygiene in class in a broader perspective, which will enable discussions on menstruation in class later.

A factor that is often missed when teaching nutrition, health and hygiene in India is the impact of puberty on mental health. Keep in mind the varied impacts of puberty on students when teaching these subjects.

Support open conversations between students of different genders.



Above: An awareness campaign conducted by Procter & Gamble-Whisper at Guru Nanak Public School in Punjabi Bagh, Delhi.

Propose strict anti-bullying measures in class. Ensure that your students know what is acceptable and what is not. Ensure that they are well aware of the consequences if these lines are crossed.

Communicate nutritional needs and requirements - often these issues aren't taught properly or glossed over.

Use activities and group discussions as a means of discussing difficult subjects. Often, students themselves may feel shy to discuss ideas that they may have been taught are taboo.



Above: An awareness campaign conducted by Procter & Gamble at Lovely Public School in Krishna Nagar, Delhi.

Way forward for school administrators

Ensure that all teachers, including male teachers, and all support staff receive Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management (MHM) training.

Develop a feedback mechanism to enable students to convey their needs.

Develop and continuously monitor MHM infrastructure in school.

Organize a committee of senior students, teachers and support staff to help monitor MHM needs.

Ensure free availability of MHM products for students, teachers and support staff.

Organize MHM workshops with parents.

Way forward for parents

Educate yourself on the issue before teaching your children. Try and understand the myths and taboos that you have been taught. Often, myths and taboos do not pass from generation to generation via external sources but rather from within the family. Educating yourself and speaking out if you are misinformed or hear others spreading misinformation is central to breaking the cycle of disinformation.

Below: An awareness programme by the Integrated Rural Community Development Society (IRCDS) in Pondavakkam village, Tiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu.

Encourage your children to speak to you about puberty and menstruation in particular. Being friendly, understanding and agreeing to speak to your children about the changes their bodies will go through during puberty is key to ensuring they do not receive misinformation.



Glossary

Access/accessibility: The ability of individuals to obtain or use a product, service or environment without encountering any barriers or obstacles. In the context of disability, accessibility refers to the ability of persons with disabilities to access goods, services and environments in a manner that is equivalent to that available to persons without disabilities.

Accessible menstrual facilities: Toilets and changing areas that are designed with accessibility in mind, including features like grab bars, adequate space and height-adjustable sinks and toilets.

Adolescence: Adolescence is the transitional phase of growth and development between childhood and adulthood. The United Nations defines an adolescent as any person between the ages of 10 years and 19 years.²⁶

Anganwadi centres: The Hindi word 'anganwadi' translates to 'courtyard shelter'. According to the Annual Report (2017-18) of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, the 'Anganwadi Services Scheme is one of the flagship programmes of the Government of India and represents one of the world's largest and unique programmes for early childhood care and development. It is the foremost symbol of the country's commitment to its children and nursing mothers, as a response to the challenge of providing pre-school non-formal education on one hand and breaking the vicious cycle of malnutrition, morbidity, reduced learning capacity and mortality on the other. The beneficiaries under the Scheme are children in the age group of 0-6 years, pregnant women and lactating mothers.'²⁷

ASHA: Accredited Social Health Activist. The programme was launched by the Indian Government in 2005 as part of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM).²⁸ ASHA workers are 'volunteer health activists in the communities, who [are] creating awareness on health and its social determinants and mobiliz[ing] the community towards local health planning and increased utilization and accountability of the existing public health services. She is a promoter of good health practices.'²⁹

Assistive technology: Devices, equipment or tools that can help menstruators with disabilities manage their periods, such as adaptive menstrual pads, tampon applicators or menstrual cups.

Biological sex: Refers to the status assigned to an individual at birth owing to their physical features. It is based on a person's physical characteristics (such as external and internal reproductive organs, chromosomes and hormones).

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity corresponds with sex assigned at birth.

Disability: According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 'Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.'³⁰

Dysmenorrhoea: Painful menstrual cramps, usually in the lower abdomen, that can interfere with daily activities.

Gender dysphoria / gender incongruence: The 11th edition of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-11) codes includes new changes to reflect modern understandings of sexual health and gender identity.³¹ ICD-11 has

²⁶ <https://data.unicef.org/topic/adolescents/overview/#:~:text=Defined%20by%20the%20United%20Nations,the%20Rights%20of%20the%20Child.>

²⁷ <https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/AR%202017-18%20Chapter%203.pdf>

²⁸ <https://nhm.gov.in/index1.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=150&lid=226>

²⁹ <http://nhmharyana.gov.in/WriteReadData/Guidelines/ASHAguidlines/ASHAguidlines/ConceptandOperationalGuidelinesofASHA.pdf>

³⁰ https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convention_accessible_pdf.pdf

³¹ <https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/frequently-asked-questions/gender-incongruence-and-transgender-health-in-the-icd>



Above: A mid-day meal being prepared. Mini Gurukulam School, Prakasam district, Andhra Pradesh.

redefined gender identity-related health, replacing outdated diagnostic categories like ICD-10's 'transsexualism' and 'gender identity disorder of children' with 'gender incongruence of adolescence and adulthood' and 'gender incongruence of childhood', respectively. Gender incongruence has been moved out of the chapter on 'Mental and behavioural disorders' and into a new chapter on 'Conditions related to sexual health'. According to the World Health Organization, 'Gender incongruence is characterized by a marked and persistent incongruence between an individual's experienced gender and their assigned sex'.³²

Gender identity: Refers to a person's deeply felt, internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not match the person's physical features or given sex at birth.

Gender-based violence (GBV): According to UN Women, violence that is directed against an individual based on their gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender is gender-based violence.³³ It is a form of discrimination that includes physical, sexual, emotional and psychological harm. GBV is a global phenomenon that affects people of all ages, socio-economic backgrounds and cultures. It can take place in public and private spheres,

such as the workplace, schools, homes and the community at large. GBV is a violation of human rights and can have long-lasting physical and mental health consequences for survivors. It is a serious public health and human rights issue that requires a comprehensive response.

Gender: According to the World Health Organization, gender 'refers to those characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time'.³⁴

³² <https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en#/http%3A%2F%2Fid.who.int%2Ficd%2Fentity%2F41470068>

³³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

³⁴ https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1

Hormones: Hormones are natural chemicals produced by the body's endocrine glands, including the ovaries and the adrenal, thyroid and pituitary glands. They play a crucial role in the menstrual cycle and puberty. During puberty, hormonal changes cause the body to develop and mature, leading to the onset of menstruation and other physical changes. Hormones such as oestrogen and progesterone control the menstrual cycle and impact menstrual flow and duration, and symptoms such as cramping and mood changes. It is important to understand the role of hormones in Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management to identify and address any menstrual health issues or irregularities.

Accessibility: In the context of Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management, accessibility refers to the ability of individuals to access information, products and services related to menstrual health and hygiene, without encountering barriers or stigma. This includes access to menstrual hygiene products such as pads and tampons, as well as access to clean and safe facilities for changing and disposing of menstrual hygiene products.³⁵

Inclusive menstrual hygiene management: The practice of addressing the menstrual health and hygiene needs of all individuals, including those with disabilities, by providing accessible facilities, products and education.

Intersex: According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, intersex people are born with sex characteristics (including genitals, gonads and chromosome patterns) that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies.

Menarche: The first menstrual period is called menarche.

Menopause: The time in a menstruator's life cycle when menstruation ends.

Menorrhagia: Heavy or prolonged menstrual bleeding, which can lead to anaemia and other health complications.

Menstrual health and hygiene (MHH): Refers to both menstrual hygiene management and the more general systemic problems that connect menstruation to health, well-being, gender equality, education, equity, empowerment and rights. According to UNESCO, these systematic factors include accurate and timely knowledge, available, safe, and affordable materials, informed and comfortable professionals, referral and access to health services, sanitation and washing facilities, positive social norms, safe and hygienic disposal, and advocacy and policy.

Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management (MHHM): Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management refers to the practices, services and products used to manage menstruation in a safe, hygienic and dignified manner. It includes access to menstrual products such as pads, tampons or menstrual cups, as well as facilities and infrastructure like toilets and clean water. MHHM also involves education and awareness-raising about menstruation and the importance of proper hygiene practices, as well as addressing cultural and social taboos and stigmas associated with menstruation. MHHM is a critical aspect of promoting gender equality, women's health and well-being, and ensuring that girls and women can fully participate in school, work and other aspects of daily life without being held back by their menstrual cycles. MHHM also focuses on the availability of clean menstrual management materials (period products) to absorb or collect menstrual blood, which can be changed in privacy as often as necessary during a menstrual period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials.

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM): According to the definition adopted by the World Health Organization and UNICEF's Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) for drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, menstrual hygiene is achieved when 'Women and adolescent girls are using a clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect menstrual blood, that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of a menstrual period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to safe and convenient facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials.'³⁶

Menstrual hygiene material: The materials used to absorb or collect menstrual flow. Appropriate use of these materials is a crucial step towards good Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management. Examples of such materials include sanitary pads, tampons, menstrual cups and cloth pads.*

* Disclaimer: Cloth pads are often considered unhygienic as they can cause infections if they are not cleaned properly.

³⁵ <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/disacc.htm#:~:text=Accessibility%20is%20about%20giving%20equal,that%20hinder%20persons%20with%20disabilities.>

³⁶ <https://washdata.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/2017-06/JMP-2012-post2015-consultation.pdf>

Menstruation: This is the first phase of the menstrual cycle. During a period, blood and old tissue from the uterus leave the body through the vagina.

Menstruator: A person who menstruates and requires MHHM support. This term includes girls, women and trans and non-binary persons. The phrase 'girls and women' has been used in many places throughout these modules as a shorthand term for the benefit of young learners and to enhance readability. The term refers to menstruators of all gender identities.

Period poverty: According to the United Nations Population Fund, period poverty 'describes the struggle many low-income women and girls face while trying to afford menstrual products. The term also refers to the increased economic vulnerability that women and girls face due the financial burden posed by menstrual supplies.'³⁷

Period shaming: The act of making someone feel ashamed, embarrassed or uncomfortable because they are menstruating, which can lead to stigmatization and discrimination against menstruating individuals.

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS): A collection of physical and emotional symptoms that occur in the days before menstruation and can include mood swings, cramps and bloating.

Puberty: Puberty is the period of development during which a person's body undergoes physical changes that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. During puberty, a person experiences the onset of menstruation and the growth of pubic hair. Other changes vary between male and female adolescents and may include the development of breasts, the growth of facial hair and the deepening of the voice.

Toxic shock syndrome (TSS): A rare but serious bacterial infection that can occur if certain menstrual products, such as tampons, are not changed regularly.

Transgender / trans: According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'trans' is sometimes used as an umbrella term to describe a wide range of identities whose appearance and characteristics are perceived as gender atypical - including transsexual people, cross-dressers (sometimes referred to as 'transvestites') and people who identify as third gender. Trans women identify as women but were classified male when they were born, trans men identify as men but were classified female when they were born, while other trans people don't identify with the gender-binary at all. Some transgender people seek surgery or take hormones to bring their bodies into alignment with their gender identities; others do not.

³⁷ <https://www.unfpa.org/menstruationfaq#:~:text=%C2%A9%20UNFPA%20India-.What%20is%20period%20poverty%3F,burden%20posed%20by%20menstrual%20supplies>

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As a brand, Whisper believes in progress not only through developing innovative products to address consumers' needs but also to help the progress of women and girls, who are the backbone of our society. Whisper believes that if one out of five girls drops out of school at puberty, this will greatly impact the development of the nation and economy. Not just that, the women's and girls' health is important; the use of unhygienic menstrual hygiene materials like hay, cloth and rags exposes them to the risk of many diseases, which can be curbed by imparting right education and knowledge about menstrual hygiene and health. This is linked to the solutions we are uniquely placed to provide – in the form of right menstrual education and right menstrual products.

#KeepGirlsInSchool is not just a campaign, it is the brand's philosophy and mission to drive menstrual education and products to every girl and woman in India. The campaign is a movement to bring change in a society where lack of period knowledge leads to taboos and restrictions including girls dropping out of school. Studies state that one out of five girls drops out of school due to lack of period education and products. Whisper has not only been women's ally in fighting the myths and prejudices attached to menstruation in India but also an advocate offering period education to mothers and girls so that the

daughters of India do not have to miss school because of menstruation.

If girls miss four days of school every month because of lack of menstrual education and unavailability of sanitary pads or hygienic menstrual facilities, they miss out on learning, eventually falling behind and completely dropping out of school. #KeepGirlsInSchool wants to drive the message that menstruation is a natural process and a sign of a healthy body and there is no reason why girls should be kept out of school because of it. Whisper aims to provide free period education and sanitary pads, working closely with government bodies, organizations like UNESCO, and schools to impart menstrual education.

Talking about this year's initiative, Whisper realized that while we are working with the government, schools and organizations at the field level, one of the first teachers of a girl is her mother. When a girl gets her period for the first time, her mother is the first person she goes to, but reports say that seven out of ten mothers do not fully understand the science of periods and find it 'dirty or impure'. Our film *The Missing Chapter* educates mothers about the biology behind periods so that they, in turn, can break the cycle and bring up aware, informed daughters who don't miss school during periods. Beyond the film, we will also be driving this message and education across other platforms, including digital and on-ground, and via key influencers.



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