Your Menstrual Health Toolkit

Under 18 year olds

MENSTRUAL HEALTH PROJECT

BEYOU

Content created by Menstrual Health Project. Design created by BeYou.

Copyright © 2023 BeYou Together Ltd and Menstrual Health Project.

Menstrual Health Charity - Registered Charity Number 1202034

Contents

All About Menstrual Health	3 - 4
Your guide to Period Products	5
Menstrual Health: Infections	6
When to seek medical advice / Conditions to be aware of	7 - 8
Contraception	9
Referral for further investigations	10
Period Tracker	11 - 12
Glossary	13

“Menstrual Health”

Definition / Your complete physical, mental, and social well-being during your menstrual cycle.

What makes menstrual health so important?

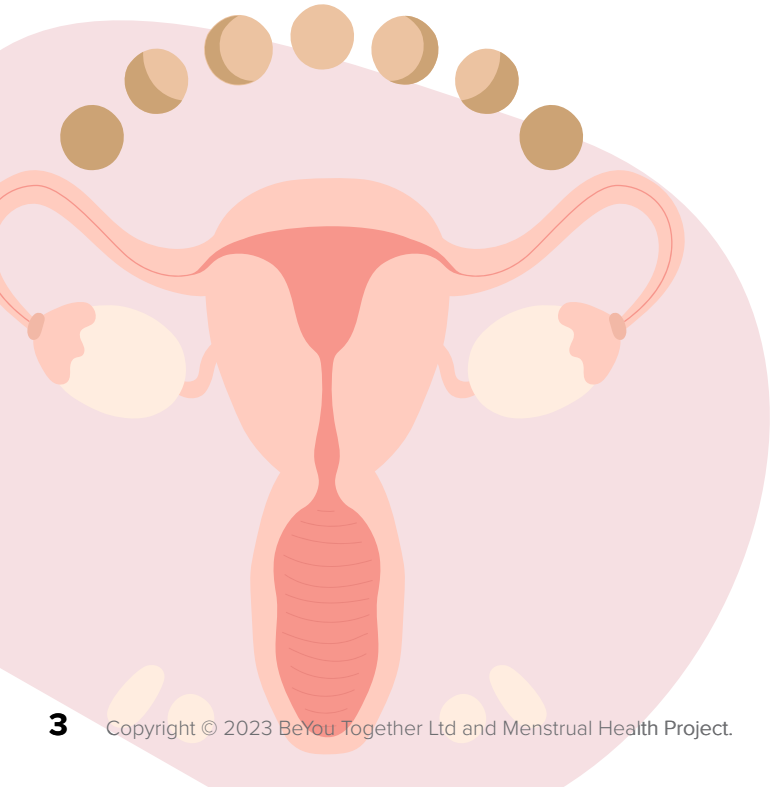
Your menstrual cycle is managed by your hormones, which impact pretty much every cell and process in your body. That means it has a key role in how you feel day to day as well as your long-term health.

That’s why it is vital that you are aware of what is going on with your body - especially in relation to your menstrual cycle. The simplest way to keep track is by using a diary or a period tracker app. That way you always have something to refer to. It also serves as a great way to make sure you spend a few minutes being mindful each day.

People can experience certain symptoms relating to their menstrual health which can be a sign of certain medical conditions – more on that later!

What is a menstrual cycle?

The menstrual cycle is the time from the first day of your period to the day before your next period.



What is a 'normal' menstrual cycle?

The length of your cycle is different from person to person. It can be anywhere between 21-40 days, with the average being every 28 days. Remember, it’s also normal to have a cycle that changes a couple of days each month. This is particularly common within teenagers, as they can experience irregular cycles.

Never ignore any of these symptoms when on your period or during your menstrual cycle:

- Heavy period flow (changing your pad more than every 3 hrs).
- Period lasting more than 7 days.
- Stomach cramps.
- Lower back pain.
- Pain when having a poo.
- Bleeding from your bottom.
- Pain when having a wee.
- Upper leg (thigh) pain.
- Extreme tiredness
- Fainting.

What is a 'normal' period?

Periods can vary from person to person. It is important to be familiar with your periods, so you can notice any changes that may be concerning.

With a normal period, you can bleed for anything between 2-7 days. It is normal for you to lose up to 80 ml (up to 5 tablespoons) of blood during your period.

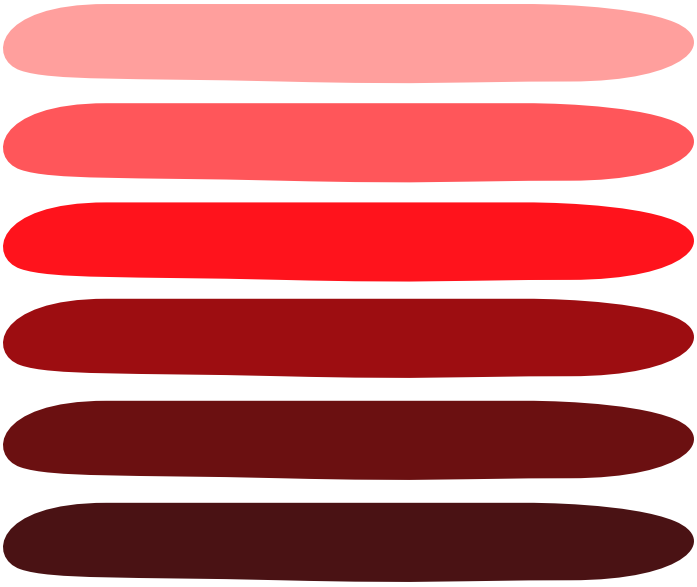
It is normal to feel some discomfort when on your period. You may feel muscle cramps in your tummy.

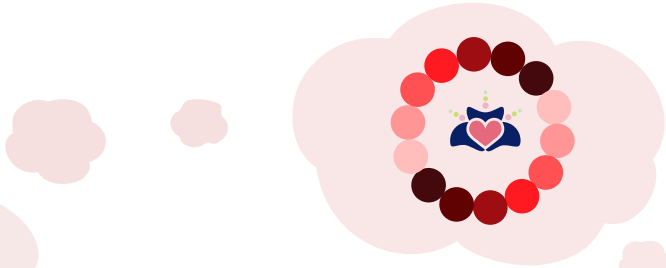
If you are experiencing painful heavy periods that is impacting your daily life you should seek advice from your GP Doctor.

Copyright © 2023 BeYou Together Ltd and Menstrual Health Project.

Period **blood chart**

The colour of blood usually has to do with the time delay between bleeding and coming out of the vagina.





Bright Red

Red blood at the start of your period indicates that the blood is fresh and comes out quicker.

Dark Red

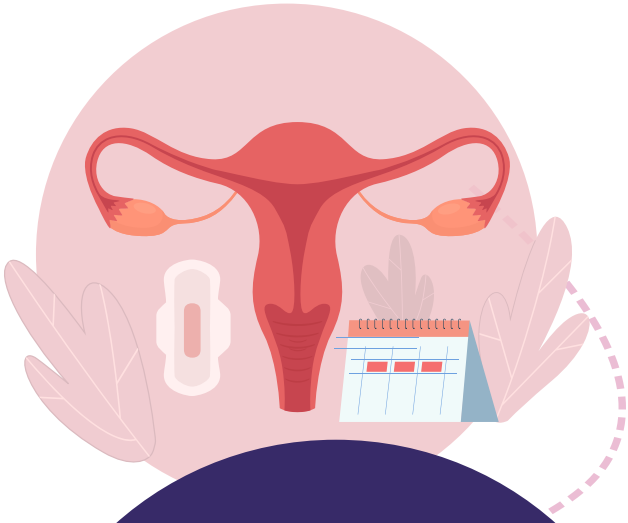
If you bleed slower, it takes longer to exit the vagina.
It becomes darker because your blood is being exposed to more air.

Please note:

Any of these shades of red can be normal during your period.

What happens during your menstrual cycle?

Your textbooks talk about 4 stages – which is true - but put simply, your menstrual cycle is made up of two parts.



Part 1: Oestrogen

Rising levels of the hormone oestrogen occurs in this half of your cycle when the egg is commonly released, and this is called ovulation. The lining in your womb also begins to thicken.

Part 2: Progesterone

In the second part of your cycle the hormone progesterone helps the womb prepare for a pregnancy. If pregnancy doesn't occur, then the egg disintegrates and is reabsorbed into the body. When the levels of Oestrogen falls, this results in a period.

Copyright © 2023 BeYou Together Ltd and Menstrual Health Project.

What is a period?

A period is part of the menstrual cycle when a person bleeds from their vagina every 28 days or so.

A period is made up of your blood and womb lining. Day 1 of your period is known as the beginning of your menstrual cycle.

When do periods begin?

Periods can begin between the ages of 9-15.A delay in starting periods isn't usually something to worry about.

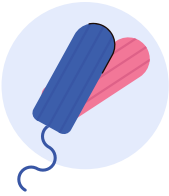
Your guide to **period products**

There are a range of different period products available. This way you can choose the one that you feel is the most comfortable and suitable for yourself.

There is no right or wrong period product. If you need further assistance on period products your local pharmacist, GP Doctor and menstrual health organisations are there to support you.

Sanitary Pads

A disposable pad that you wear externally (which you stick on to the inside of your underwear). Sanitary pads are more beneficial when you have a heavier period. You must replace your sanitary pad every 2-3 hours depending on your period flow.



Tampons

A disposable product in a cylinder shape. You insert tampons into your vagina. You should not be able to feel them if your body tolerates them.

You should change your tampon every 4-6 hours depending on your period flow. Otherwise tampons can carry the risk of causing an infection.

If on inserting tampon it is painful please speak to your GP doctor.

Menstrual Cups

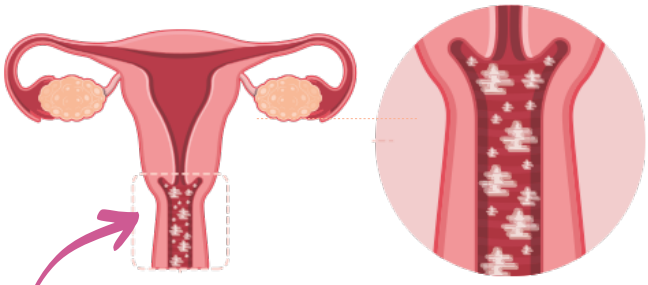
A menstrual cup is a reusable cup that is inserted into your vagina during your period. It comes in a variety of sizes. You can wear it up to 12 hours a day without it stopping your normal activities. They create less waste than sanitary pads and tampons. Menstrual cups may not be suitable for those with a heavier flow.

Period Underwear

A form of underwear that is specially designed to be used during your period. They are different from regular underwear because they have multiple layers to absorb the blood you lose during your period. Period underwear can be more absorbent than tampons and sanitary pads. Those who suffer from heavy periods tend to use them as extra protection at night. They also are reusable, which creates less waste than sanitary pads and tampons.

You do still have to change period underwear on a regular basis. (There are different types of period underwear. Please check guidelines on how long you can use them for).

Copyright © 2023 BeYou Together Ltd and Menstrual Health Project.



What is thrush?

Thrush is a yeast infection that can affect the vagina causing itchiness, irritation and white discharge.

It is easily treatable with ointments, lotions or tablets - just ask your pharmacist or GP Doctor.

It is important to maintain good hygiene whilst on your period to reduce the risk of developing infections.

Bacterial Vaginosis

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is a common cause for unusual vaginal discharge. BV is not a sexually transmitted infection, but it can increase your risk of getting STIs.

Things you can do yourself:

- Use water to wash your genital area (no perfumed/fragranced products).
- Have showers instead of baths.

Symptoms of Bacterial Vaginosis:

- Unusual vaginal discharge that has a strong smell.
- Change of colour and consistency of your discharge (such as becoming grey/white and thin and watery).

Half of people with Bacterial Vaginosis do not have any symptoms.

Treatment for Bacterial Vaginosis:

Prescribed by a GP or sexual health clinic.

What is a Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)?

Urinary tract infections are a type of infection that affect your urinary tract, including your bladder (cystitis), urethra, or kidneys (kidney infections).

UTI's may be treated with antibiotics, but they are not always needed.

Symptoms of a Urinary Tract Infection:

- Pain or a burning sensation when weeing.
- Needing to wee more often than usual.
- Cloudy, dark or strong smelling wee.
- Needing to wee suddenly.
- Blood in your wee.
- Lower tummy pain.
- Lower back pain.
- Pain under the ribs.
- High temperature (feeling hot or shivery).
- Nausea or sickness.

Things you can do yourself to help ease UTI symptoms:

- Take paracetamol up to 4 times a day to help with pain and a high temperature.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Rest plenty.

Remember your local pharmacist can offer advice and support on urinary tract infections.

Treatment from your doctor:

- You will need to provide the doctor with a wee sample in order for them to test for an infection.
- If your sample comes back positive for an infection the doctor may give you a short course of antibiotics to treat it.

Copyright © 2023 BeYou Together Ltd and Menstrual Health Project.

When to seek **medical advice?**

If you are experiencing any of the above symptoms and/or your periods are stopping you from doing your daily activities such as going to school/ college, socialising with friends and doing your hobbies then you should seek advice from your GP Doctor.

Painful periods can be an indication of an underlying condition therefore it is important not to ignore your symptoms if they are impacting your daily life.

Talking to your GP Doctor

- Your GP Doctor will ask questions you may think are too personal, but don't worry the more information you give them the better understanding they will have on your situation.
- Prepare information with regards to your menstrual cycle, regular symptoms, patterns you have noticed with your periods and overall health in general.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions.
- Talking to your doctor can some times feel overwhelming. Always try and take someone supportive with you, this can be a family member or a friend.

Conditions to be aware of that can cause painful periods:

Endometriosis

Endometriosis is a systematic inflammatory condition where cells similar to the lining of the womb are found elsewhere in the body which can cause debilitating symptoms.

Symptoms of Endometriosis can be:

- Long and/or erratic periods.
- Pelvic pain.
- Lower back pain.
- Pain when having a poo.
- Pain when having a wee.
- Pain during or after sex.
- Extreme tiredness.
- Vomiting and/or nausea.
- Thigh pain.
- Bloating.
- Ovulation pain.
- Sleep disruption.
- Mood swings.

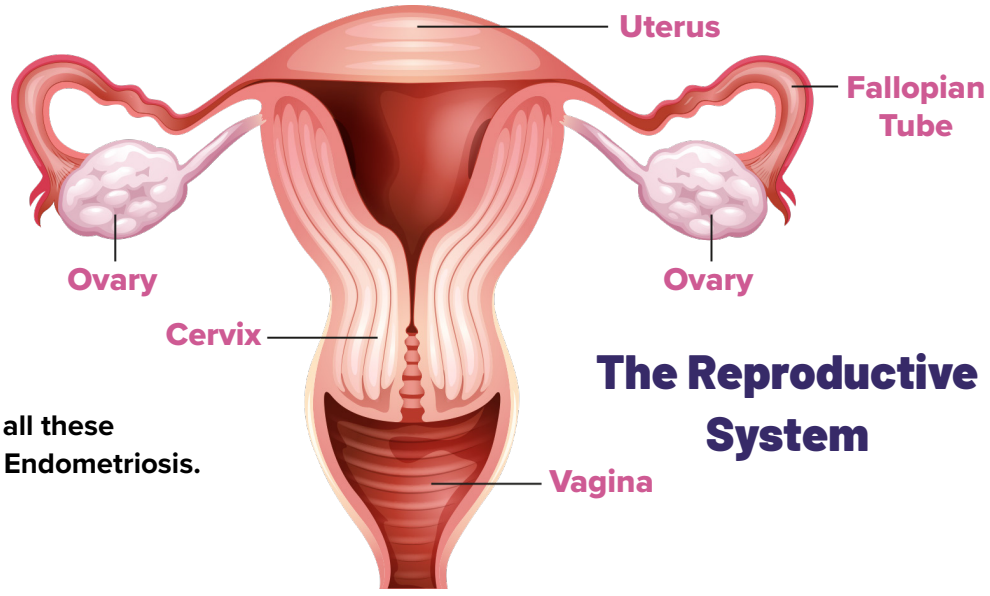
Some may experience some or all these symptoms when suffering with Endometriosis.

Adenomyosis

It occurs when the tissue that normally lines the womb grows into the muscular wall of the womb.

Symptoms of adenomyosis can be:

- Heavy painful or irregular periods.
- Pre-menstrual pelvic pain.
- Pain during sex.
- Pain when you go for a poo.
- Pressure pain on bladder and when going for a wee.



The Reproductive System

Copyright © 2023 BeYou Together Ltd and Menstrual Health Project.

PCOS

This is a complex condition of altered hormone production where your periods may be less frequent. You may have more of a certain type of hormone (androgens) and your ovaries can contain small follicles that struggle to develop and produce an egg.

Symptoms of PCOS can be:

- Irregular periods or no periods.
- Excessive hair growth.
- Weight gain.
- Thinning hair or hair loss.
- Oily skin or acne.

Fibroids

Fibroids are growths that develop in or around the womb. They are made up of a muscle and fibrous tissue which vary in size.

Symptoms of Fibroids can be:

- Heavy periods.
- Tummy pain.
- Lower back pain.
- Needing to wee frequently.
- Constipation.
- Pain or discomfort during sex.

PMS (Premenstrual Syndrome)

This is the name for the symptoms women can experience in the weeks before their period.

Symptoms of PMS can be:

- Mood swings.
- Feeling anxious.
- Tiredness.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Bloating or tummy pain.
- Breast tenderness.
- Headaches.
- Spotty skin.
- Greasy hair.
- Changes in appetite and sex drive.

Most women and those assigned female at birth will have PMS at some point.

PMDD *(Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder)*

A small number of women may experience more severe symptoms of PMS known as PMDD.

Symptoms of PMDD are similar to PMS, but are much more intense and can have a greater negative impact on your daily life.

Symptoms of PMDD can be:

- Physical symptoms such as cramps, headaches, joint and muscle pain.
- Behavioural symptoms such as binge eating and problems sleeping.
- Mental and emotional symptoms such as anxiety, anger, depression & in some cases suicidal.

Never feel embarrassed about talking about your menstrual health. It is just as important to talk about as other areas of your health.

PAINFUL PERIODS ARE NOT NORMAL.

What if I suspect I may have Endometriosis?

1. Note down your symptoms with our pain tracker.
2. Read NICE guidelines for Endometriosis care.
3. Speak to your GP with the information to discuss treatment strategies.

This is when you can work together with your GP to manage your symptoms.

What if I suspect I may have any of the above conditions?

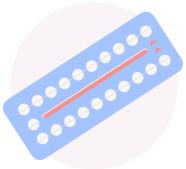
If you feel that you may be experiencing any of these symptoms, we advise to discuss this with your GP doctor.

Copyright © 2023 BeYou Together Ltd and Menstrual Health Project.

Contraception

Contraception is to be discussed with a medical professional as to which one is most suitable for you and the different side affects of each one.

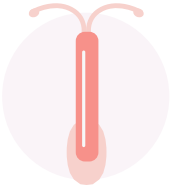
The Pill *(combined oral contraceptive)*



- This contraceptive is taken orally.
- There are lots of different varieties to try to see which is suitable for you.
- Different pills have different ways of working, they usually work by suppressing the ovaries to produce less oestrogen.
- When taken for contraception it is usually taken for 21 days with a 7 day break.
- The pill can help alleviate acne.
- Combined oral contraceptives are not suitable if you suffer with blood clots or migraines.

POSSIBLE side affects such as mood issues (irritability), weight gain, irregular vaginal bleeding, bloating, breast tenderness.

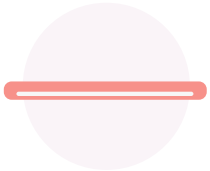
The Mirena Coil



- The coil is placed within the womb.
- Can remain in place for up to 5 years.
- Can be used in combination with the combined oral contraceptive.
- Initially people may suffer with irregular bleeding. This symptom can improve and the bleeding becomes significantly less heavy and troublesome.
- It can be taken out earlier as and when required, which can be done with your GP or nearest family planning clinic.

POSSIBLE side affects - altered moods, skin problems, breast tenderness.

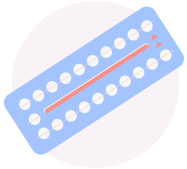
The Implant



- Another form of long lasting contraception.
- It involves placing a small plastic rod under the skin (usually under the skin of the upper arm). Which will be done by a nurse or doctor at your GP practice, nearest family planning clinic or hospital.
- It can stay in place for up to 3 years or removed earlier if necessary.

POSSIBLE side affects - irregular bleeding, Acne, headaches, altered mood, headaches, breast tenderness.

The Mini Pill *(progesterone only pill)*



- It is known as a long acting reversible contraceptive as it is taken every day without a break.
- It should be taken the same time every day or within a short window. Otherwise it may not be as effective.

POSSIBLE side affects may include irregular vaginal bleeding, altered mood, acne, headaches.

The Depo Provera

- This long lasting contraceptive is given in a form of an injection every 3 months for up to 2 years.
- The injection is often given in your buttock.
- It is well tolerated amongst many and an alternative to taking a pill.
- The Depo Provera can be associated with weight gain and osteoporosis (weakened bone density).
- It can potentially take 1 year for your periods to return to normal once stopped.

POSSIBLE side affects- irregular bleeding, headaches, hair loss, acne, altered moods.

Copyright © 2023 BeYou Together Ltd and Menstrual Health Project.

Referral for **further investigations**

For those with suspected Endometriosis they can refer to the NICE guidelines for a referral. These guidelines are not age discriminative, this means they apply to any age.

- They should refer you per the NICE guidelines if a patient has severe, persistent or recurrent symptoms of Endometriosis.
- They have pelvic signs of Endometriosis.
- Initial management is not effective, not tolerated or is contraindicated.
- If they have symptoms or confirmed deep Endometriosis involving the bowel, bladder or ureters they need referring to a BSGE accredited Endometriosis centre.

If you have had a negative experience with a particular medical professional, you can request a second opinion.

NICE Guidelines for Endometriosis

Remember sometimes what you are going through is not normal. Trust your body. You know better than anybody.

Do not be afraid or embarrassed to speak up. Sooner you can get the correct help and support the better.

Accessing Emotional Support

Support groups

Ask your GP

Social Media

Wellness Tips

- Pain Relief Patches
- Heat Pads / Hot water bottles.
- Pain management clinic (ask GP Doctor or specialist for referral).
- Balanced diet.
- Meditation and mindfulness.
- Journaling for mental health.
- Gentle exercise where possible.
- Counselling.
- Resting – allowing yourself to take a break when needed.
- Supplements/Vitamins to help boost your immune system.
- Accessing online support.
- Talk openly & honestly.
- Prepare when travelling so you have everything you need in case of a flare up.
- Ask for flexibility when needed in your educational or work life setting.

Copyright © 2023 BeYou Together Ltd and Menstrual Health Project.

Your Period *tracker*

☐ Early ☐ On time ☐ Late

☐ Taking contraception

	Date DD / MM / YYYY Day of your bleed	Colour of Blood Please refer to the blood chart on P.3	Your Symptoms Please tick the boxes of the symptoms you are experiencing	Pain Scale Please refer to the pain scale below
MONDAY	Date: Period day: _____	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ Back pain ☐ Pain whilst pooing ☐ Pain whilst weeing ☐ Stomach pain ☐ Nausea or Sickness	
TUESDAY	Date: Period day: _____	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ Back pain ☐ Pain whilst pooing ☐ Pain whilst weeing ☐ Stomach pain ☐ Nausea or Sickness	
WEDNESDAY	Date: Period day: _____	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ Back pain ☐ Pain whilst pooing ☐ Pain whilst weeing ☐ Stomach pain ☐ Nausea or Sickness	
THURSDAY	Date: Period day: _____	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ Back pain ☐ Pain whilst pooing ☐ Pain whilst weeing ☐ Stomach pain ☐ Nausea or Sickness	
FRIDAY	Date: Period day: _____	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ Back pain ☐ Pain whilst pooing ☐ Pain whilst weeing ☐ Stomach pain ☐ Nausea or Sickness	
SATURDAY	Date: Period day: _____	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ Back pain ☐ Pain whilst pooing ☐ Pain whilst weeing ☐ Stomach pain ☐ Nausea or Sickness	
SUNDAY	Date: Period day: _____	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ Back pain ☐ Pain whilst pooing ☐ Pain whilst weeing ☐ Stomach pain ☐ Nausea or Sickness	

THE PAIN SCALE

0	No pain	6	Hard to ignore, avoid usual activities
1	Hardly notice pain	7	Focus of attention prevents doing daily activities
2	Notice pain, does not interfere with activites	8	Awful, hard to do anything
3	Sometimes distracts me	9	Can't bear the pain, unable to do anything
4	Distracts me, can do usual activities	10	As bad as it could be, nothing else matters
5	Interrupts some activities		

If any changes occur that it's important to track them and if it impacts your quality of life you should seek medical

	Any other symptoms? e.g. Body aches, bloating, fatigue, headaches, acne, anxiety, breast tenderness, cervical discharge, temperature, diarrhoea or constipation, moodiness, night sweats, trouble sleeping	Mood Please circle the moods you are feeling today	Medication Please note any medications you have used today
MONDAY		Depressed Emotional Tired Happy Sad Stressed Angry Overwhelmed Excited Grumpy Lonely Worried	
TUESDAY		Depressed Emotional Tired Happy Sad Stressed Angry Overwhelmed Excited Grumpy Lonely Worried	
WEDNESDAY		Depressed Emotional Tired Happy Sad Stressed Angry Overwhelmed Excited Grumpy Lonely Worried	
THURSDAY		Depressed Emotional Tired Happy Sad Stressed Angry Overwhelmed Excited Grumpy Lonely Worried	
FRIDAY		Depressed Emotional Tired Happy Sad Stressed Angry Overwhelmed Excited Grumpy Lonely Worried	
SATURDAY		Depressed Emotional Tired Happy Sad Stressed Angry Overwhelmed Excited Grumpy Lonely Worried	
SUNDAY		Depressed Emotional Tired Happy Sad Stressed Angry Overwhelmed Excited Grumpy Lonely Worried	

Never feel embarrassed for talking about your periods.

It is important to normalise the conversation surrounding our menstrual health.

Toolkit Glossary A-Z

Abdomen - The space in the body between the chest and pelvis

Androgens - A group of sex hormones. They help start puberty and play a role in reproductive health and body development. All genders make androgens, but males make more of them.

Anus - The opening of the rectum (last part of the large intestine) to the outside of the body.

Bloating - A condition where your tummy feels and looks full. It can often feel tight and uncomfortable, even painful in some cases.

Follicle - A small, fluid-filled sac in the ovary that contains one immature egg.

Hormones - Chemical messengers that coordinate different functions in your body.

Nausea - A stomach discomfort and the sensation of wanting to be sick.

Oral - Relating to the mouth, for example: "A tablet is taken orally"

Osteoporosis - A health condition that weakens bones, making them fragile and more likely to break.

Ovulation - The process in which an egg is released from the ovary.

Pelvis - The area of the body below the abdomen that contains the hip bones, bladder, and rectum. In females, it also contains the vagina, cervix, uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries.

Rectum - The straight section of the large intestine connected to the anus.

Reproductive System

Cervix - The lower, narrow end of the uterus that forms a canal between the uterus and vagina.

Fallopian Tubes - Slender tubes that connect the ovaries to the uterus. Eggs pass from the ovaries, through the fallopian tubes, to the uterus.

Ovaries - Small, oval-shaped glands located on either side of your uterus. They produce and store your eggs and make hormones that control your menstrual and pregnancy.

Uterus - Also known as the womb, is a hollow, muscular organ located in the pelvis between the bladder and rectum of individuals who are assigned female at birth.

Vagina - A muscular tube that provides the passageway from the outside of the body to the uterus (womb) *See page 6 for diagram.*

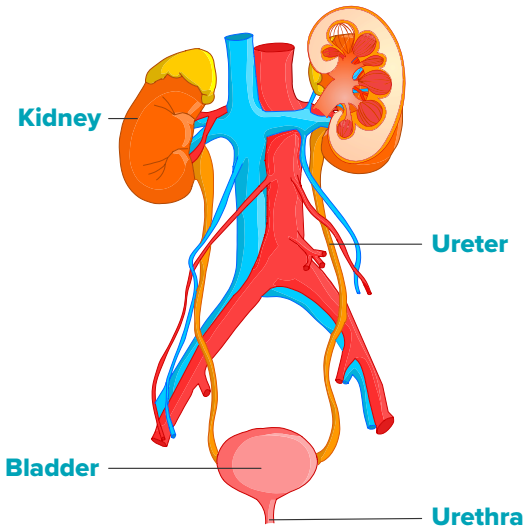
Urinary System

Bladder - The bladder is a round, bag-like organ that stores your wee.

Kidneys - The kidneys are two bean-shaped organs in the renal system. They help the body pass waste as wee.

Ureter - A tube that carries wee from the kidney to the urinary bladder. There are two ureters, one attached to each kidney.

Urethra - The tube through which wee leaves the body. It empties wee from the bladder.



Content created by Menstrual Health Project. Design created by BeYou.

beyou.co.uk

www.menstrualhealthproject.org.uk
hello@menstrualhealthproject.org.uk

Menstrual Health Charity - Registered Charity Number 1202034