

# PUBERTY: MY PERIOD – ALL ABOUT MENSTRUATION LESSON 5

DIFFERING ABILITIES

## LEARNER OUTCOME

Describe physical, emotional and social changes that occur during puberty; e.g., menstruation<sup>1</sup>



### MATERIALS:

1. Selection of menstrual pads and tampons
2. **HANDOUT: Menstruation Checklist**
3. **HANDOUT: How Does Your Period Work?**
4. **HANDOUT: Sample Calendar**



### INTRODUCTION:

Knowing what will happen during puberty is the first step towards adapting well to adolescence. Learning facts about bodies and growing up can help us to stay healthy, take good care of ourselves, and make good decisions.<sup>2</sup> Developing positive coping strategies is essential to adolescent development. The following lesson examines specific skills to cope with menstruation in detail.



For many girls having their period is seen as a sign of growing up and changing into a young woman. While some girls may see this as a rite of passage, something to be excited about, others may feel anxious. Students with differing abilities may need extra time to learn how to take care of themselves when menstruating. Often girls will have their first period and then not have another period for a few months. This can be challenging as these students will have to relearn how to manage. Learning how to cope with menstruation is a skill just like other hygiene routines such as care of the skin or shaving.



## APPROACHES/STRATEGIES:

### A. GROUND RULES

Ensure ground rules are established before beginning this lesson. For classes that have already established ground rules, quickly reviewing them can promote a successful lesson.

Be prepared for giggles in your class. Try to acknowledge students' reactions to the subject by saying that puberty and body parts can be difficult to talk about and it's ok to feel a bit uncomfortable.



Sexual health education occurs most effectively in a classroom where there is a mutual feeling of trust, safety and comfort. Having Ground Rules in place can be a very successful way to facilitate a positive classroom environment. Click [here](#) for more information on how to set up ground rules.

### B. FEMALE SELF CARE: MENSTRUATION

1. Begin by asking what students know about 'periods'.
2. .
3. Explain that about once a month for a few days, girls who have reached puberty have a period. Another name for having a period is menstruation. There are also slang words e.g., having your monthly.
4. Menstruation can begin as early as 8 or as late as 16. Every girl has her own internal clock.
5. The lining of the uterus builds up every month to prepare the body to nourish a baby if a woman is pregnant. If a baby is not conceived, 4–6 tablespoons of blood comes out through the vagina between the legs as it is not needed. This is a normal part of life for a woman and does not stop people from carrying out their everyday activities.
6. Then ask your students the following questions:
  - a. How many people have seen ads/commercials on TV about pads or tampons?
  - b. How many people have talked to their parents/guardians about this?
  - c. How many people have seen commercials about pads with wings? What are the wings for?

### C. HANDS-ON ACTIVITY: USING MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS

1. Using the Puberty Kit from Lesson 4 show the students some menstrual pads. Let your students know that various sizes are available and it is best to use the unscented ones. Young women should talk to a parent / guardian about what's best to use.
2. Explain that tampons are often not used by young women when their period first starts. Using tampons requires practise and students may need help with this. You may want to demonstrate using a glass of water how tampons work by placing the tampon in the water and watching as it rapidly absorbs the water.
3. Lay the menstrual items out on a table so your students can touch and feel them. If possible, use a sample pad and a pair of women's underwear to demonstrate how to take the cover off the sticky strip on the back of the pad and show how it fits into a pair of underwear. Below you will find some discussion points to share with your students.

**Sanitary pads / napkins:** Are special cotton filled, plastic lined pads used to catch menstrual blood. They come in different sizes for the different flows. Also, some pads come with wings that wrap around the leg openings of the underwear. Most have a sticky strip that holds the pad to the underwear. Pads should be changed often. Also it is important to choose pads that are unscented.

**Panty liner:** Similar to pads. Panty liners are used to catch light menstrual flow or vaginal discharge.

**Tampons:** Are another way to catch menstrual blood. Many young women like to use tampons as they can be worn for sports including swimming. They are made of soft cotton and have a string attached to the bottom. Tampons are inserted into the vagina with the string hanging down through the vaginal opening. The tampon is removed by pulling gently on the string. Tampons need to be changed often (every 4 – 6 hours). Choose unscented tampons. \*A common mistake people make when using tampons for the first time is not inserting the tampon into the vagina far enough. If you are wearing a tampon properly, you should not be able to feel it.

**Menstrual cups:** Made of silicone these small cups fit inside the vagina to catch the menstrual flow. They can be kept in for up to 12 hours at time and can be worn for sports including swimming. Some of the cups are reusable when cared for correctly.

4. Be sure to discuss how to dispose of these items (i.e. wrap in toilet tissue and dispose in garbage; don't flush in toilets).
  - a. For some groups, you may have to demonstrate how to dispose of used materials properly. To do this, take toilet paper and a pad. Demonstrate how to fold a pad and then how to roll it in toilet paper.
  - b. Also, buy a supply of menstrual care items and have students practice proper wrapping and disposal of pads and tampons.
  - c. Then take your female students into the restroom and show them (or see if they can show you) where to dispose of used pads. Discuss where they should dispose pads at home too. Emphasize again that pads are never flushed down the toilet.
5. Discuss how often to change pads/tampons (every 3-4 hours, or more often if needed). Reinforce the need to wash hands both before and after changing a pad or tampon.
6. Personal hygiene during menstruation is very important. Emphasize to students that it is not unhealthy for a young woman to shower during her period. Wearing clean clothes and changing pads/tampons often will help prevent unpleasant odours.



The use of tampons can increase the risk of TSS (toxic shock syndrome). It is not recommended that females use tampons at night, they should use a pad instead while sleeping. Changing tampons often and not leaving a tampon in longer than 6-8 hours can reduce the risk.

#### D. BEING PREPARED DISCUSSION

1. Begin by asking students the following questions:
  - a. Why should a young woman who is old enough to have a period always have a pad or a tampon with her?
  - b. Where could she keep it?
  - c. What could a young woman do who starts her period at school and doesn't have a pad or a tampon with her?
  - d. How can she ask for one? Who could she ask?
2. Most young women will have their period about once a month, bleeding for approximately 4- 7 days. Young women may find it helpful to know when to be prepared by having supplies in their backpack or locker.. Use the handout **How Does Your Period Work?** to explain to students how they can predict their next period.

3. Have your female students practice going to the office (with an assistant / teacher) to ask the secretary for a pad or tampon.

### What would you do? – scenarios

Read the following situations and have your students tell what they would do in each case.

- a. A young woman looks on her calendar and sees that her period is supposed to start this week. (She should put 2 pads or tampons in her purse or backpack.)
- b. A young woman starts her period for the first time when she is at home. (She should go put on a pad and tell her parents/guardians.)
- c. A young woman has her period and some blood gets on her underwear. (At home she should change her underwear and put on a new pad. At school, she should try to wipe the blood with toilet paper and then put on a new pad.)
- d. A young woman is in class and she thinks she feels her period start. (She should ask to go to the washroom and when she gets there, she should put on a pad.)
- e. A young woman starts her period and the blood soaks through her clothes. (Reassure your students that this sometimes happens to almost all women. It can be embarrassing but all women understand how this can happen. She should get a teacher, school nurse, parent or guardian to help her.)



When a girl first starts to have her period she may not experience regular monthly bleeding. It can take up to two years for periods to be regular. For girls with differing abilities this can be challenging as they learn hygiene and coping skills and then may have to relearn the skills after a few months once again. Just like any new skill, practice and patience is required. If irregular bleeding becomes problematic visiting a doctor to talk about the issue may be helpful.

## E. LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF DURING YOUR PERIOD

Menstruation is a normal part of a female's life that should not prevent taking part in everyday activities. However, some young women may experience some discomfort such as the following:

- Menstrual cramps may be uncomfortable either before or during a period. A hot water bottle, a heating bag or moderate exercise can relieve cramps. If cramps become severe then visiting the doctor to discuss solutions is advised.

- PMS (pre-menstrual syndrome) can occur any time in the two weeks before menstruation. It can make a woman feel moody, irritable, have tender breasts or bloating. Exercising and avoiding caffeine and salt can minimize the symptoms of PMS.



Growing up and changing can be exciting and scary at the same time. Encourage students to talk about concerns they may have about menstruation with a trusted adult. Ask students to give examples of people in their lives who they can talk through things that are bothering them or if they need to ask for hygiene items discussed in this lesson. Some may say their parents or guardians but they may also include teachers or school staff.

## F. MENSTRUATION CHECKLIST

Complete the **Menstruation Checklist** as a final activity to help reinforce the lesson objectives.



## QUESTION BOX

Have students fill out questions and address them next class.



The process of asking questions is an important learning activity that helps students clarify and validate information being presented. Question Box is a method of individualized instruction which has been proven to enhance learning. Click [here](#) for more information on how to use the question box.



## SELF REFLECTION

During the lesson, were:

- Ground rules being followed?
- Good practices established regarding group work and discussion?

What will you change for future classes with this group?

What will you change for future use of this lesson?



## STUDENT ASSESSMENT

During the lesson, did students:

### Knowledge:

- Identify various changes that occur during menstruation?
- Describe ways to cope with the changes that occur with menstruation?
- Identify support systems that can help during menstruation?

### Skills:

- Demonstrate appropriate listening and speaking skills during class discussion?

### Attitudes:

- Acknowledge that changes will occur during menstruation and puberty?
  - Accept that change is part of puberty?
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<sup>1</sup>Alberta Education. (2002). *Health and life skills guide to implementation: Kindergarten to grade 9*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/352993/pos>.

<sup>2</sup> Harris, R.H., & Emberley, M. (2009). *It's perfectly normal: Changing bodies, growing up, and sexual health (15th Anniversary Edition)*. Somerville MA: Candlewick Press.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# MENSTRUATION CHECKLIST

**Directions:**

Please read the statement carefully. If the statement is true, place a check mark in the **YES** column. If the statement is false, place a check mark in the **NO** column.

STATEMENT	YES	NO
A girl should wash her hands before and after changing her menstrual pad or tampon.		
A used menstrual pad should be flushed down the toilet.		
When a girl is menstruating, she should change her menstrual pad every two days.		
A girl who is old enough to menstruate should always have a pad or tampon with her.		
If a girl starts her menstrual period at school, and does not have a menstrual pad or tampon, she can ask the secretary for one.		
All teenage girls get menstrual periods every four weeks.		
It is normal to have a foul smelling discharge from the vagina.		
If a menstrual pad has wings, it is able to fly.		
When a girl is menstruating, she cannot play sports.		



# How does your period work?

Sometimes a period is called a **menstrual cycle**.

- The menstrual cycle is the time it takes for an egg to be released and the uterus to prepare itself for an egg if it is fertilized.
- If an egg is not fertilized, the uterus sheds its lining, the blood. This is your period.
- You can count the days in your cycle to help you know when to expect your next period. This is useful so that you can prepare e.g., you can have some pads or tampons in your backpack/locker.

## Counting the days

- Take a calendar (see sample calendar on next page). On the first day of your period circle the date.
- You will bleed for about 5 days.

## How long is your cycle?

- The next time you get your period circle the first day of your period again.
- Count the number of days from the first circled date to the second circled date. Be sure to include the circled dates when counting. Example: your bleeding starts September 2. Your next period starts September 30. Your cycle length is 29 days.
- It may be as short as 21 days or as long as 36 days.

## Is my cycle always the same?

- Your cycle may be the same every month or it may change.
- The number of days may be shorter or longer.
- Stress, sickness and medications can all change the number of days. If you do not get your period and you are having sex you may be pregnant.
- If you are ever worried about your period talk to a doctor or nurse.

# Sample Calendar

Month One						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat

Month Two						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat