

girl•ology[®]

CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER

You Got IT.

ALL THE STUFF
YOU NEED TO KNOW
WHEN YOU START
YOUR PERIOD

Melisa Holmes, MD
Trish Hutchison, MD
Founders of Girlology[®] & Guyology[®]



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This is stuff you need to know.



Introduction

Well, Hello Aunt FLO.

It must have happened, or someone thinks it's happening soon.

Your period.

Surprised? Excited?

If you're like most girls, there was no warning or announcement, it just showed up.

Maybe you were totally surprised, and maybe you've been waiting for it -- *like, forever*. Either way, **congratulations!** Starting your period is a sign that your body is growing and changing exactly as it should. It's normal, and it's a sign of being healthy.

Now, what do you do?
And what do you need to know?

Don't worry.

This book will cover what you need to know to stay completely cool and totally smart about periods.

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girl·ology
CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER

CHAPTER 1:

WHY You Have It.

There are lots of different names that you can use for your period. Some are serious & scientific.

menstruation • menstrual cycle • menses

Some are super awesome code words.

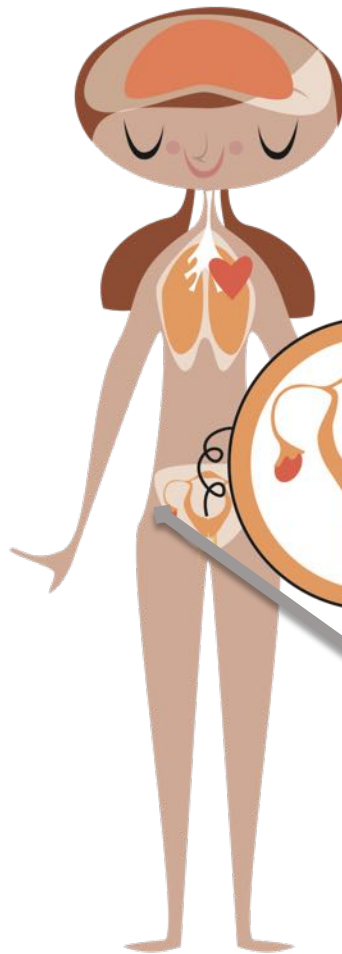
Aunt Flo • dot • monthly visitor • riding the cotton pony
• that time of the month • crimson wave • shark week

Whatever you want to call it, if you have started your period, you are well into **puberty**. That means your **breasts** have been growing and you have some **pubic hair** “down there.”

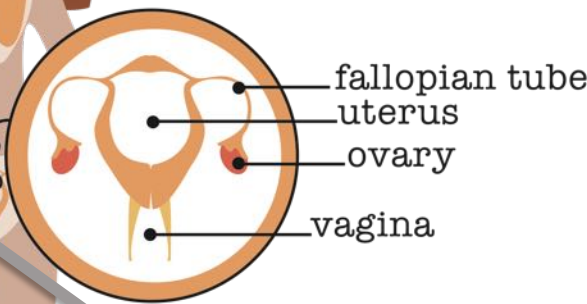
All of these changes of puberty are helping your body switch from looking like a little girl to looking more like a teen or young adult. **Puberty happens so that one day your body will be able to have a baby.**



To understand **why you have a period**, you also have to understand some things about your body.

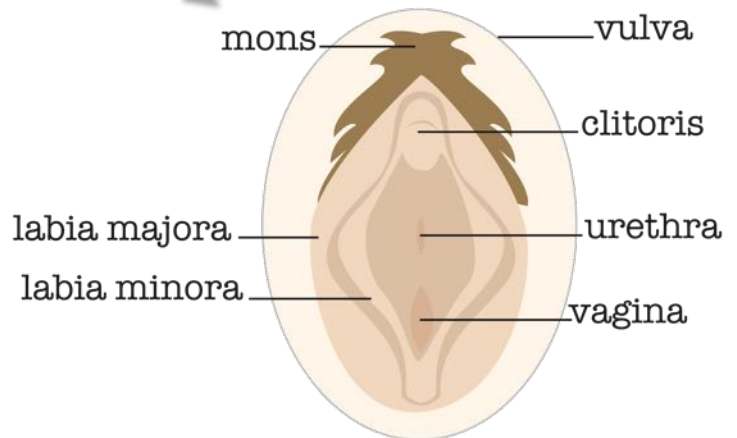


Inside your body you have a pretty amazing body part called a **uterus**. Only girls and women have a uterus because it's where a baby grows.



The uterus is connected to the **vagina** which opens to the outside of your body in your "private" area. The real name for the private area between your legs is your **vulva**.

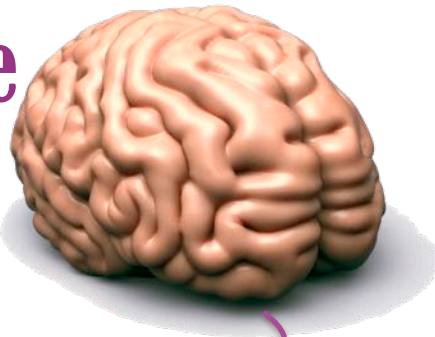
Your **vagina** is one of the openings down there along with your pee hole, which has the medical name **urethra** (ur REE thra). The **labia** are the "flaps" that provide some padding and protection for the area.



Your period happens because

your **hormones**

(chemical messengers sent from your brain)
tell your uterus to start practicing to prepare
for a baby.



Inside your body The uterus gets ready by making a thick, lush “bed” of blood and nutrients inside the uterus.

The inside of the uterus has a layer called the **endometrium** (*en doe ME tree um*) that provides the “bed” for a fetus (a baby-to-be) to grow.

If you think about what we need to survive, it makes sense. To live, all people need shelter, safety, food, water, and oxygen. Believe it or not, the uterus and endometrium provide exactly this type of environment for a growing baby.

The uterus provides the shelter and safe place to grow. The endometrium is lined with nutrients and water. And there is blood that supplies the oxygen.

what a cool little habitat.

It's a cycle

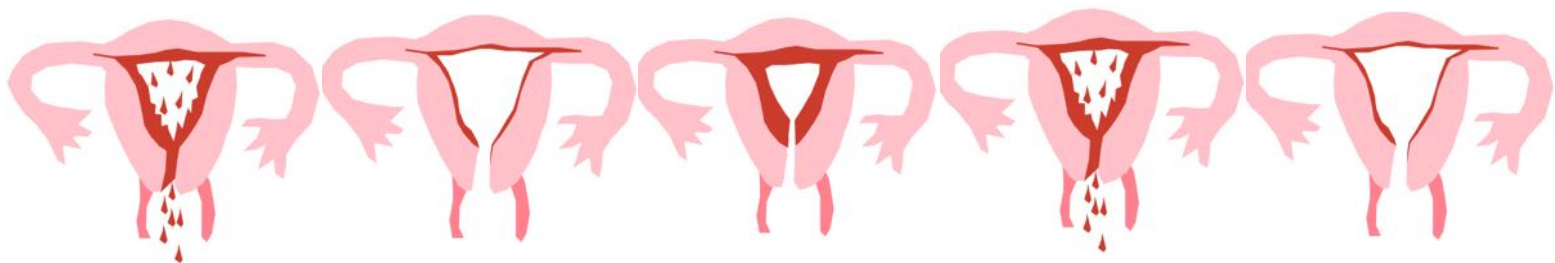
Now, back to the “bed,” After a few weeks, if there’s no baby, the uterus pushes the **endometrium** out and starts to freshen up. It’s sort of like it says, “Oh well, no baby here! It’s time to change the sheets.” It then releases or sheds the lining of the endometrium, which comes out of the vagina as a **period**.



The whole period contains less than a couple of tablespoons of actual blood. But it seems like more because of the other fluids and tissue that come out with it.



Once the uterus sheds the endometrium, it remakes the “bed” with a fresh lining--like fresh sheets--and starts over. This happens about once every month or so.



That's why periods are called a cycle.

CHAPTER 2:

WHAT to expect.

By the time you start your period, you will already be used to having some wetness or moisture around your vagina from your **vaginal discharge** (that's the creamy white or yellowish stuff that comes out of your vagina and can dry up in your underwear—yes, that's normal). So, sometimes when you first start your period, you may not even realize it has started until you see it. It can feel just like your usual discharge feels when it **oozes** out.

It will NOT feel like something pouring out of your body.



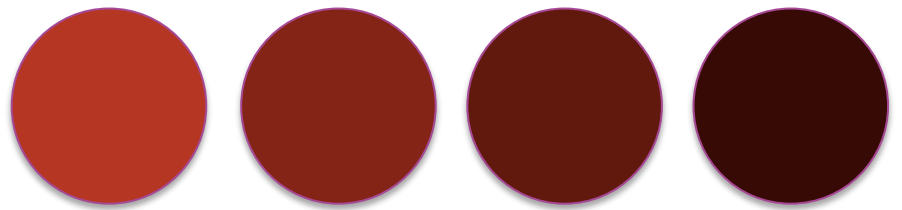
Occasionally, you may feel more of a **gush** as a heavier flow leaves your vagina. That can be totally normal, especially if you are laughing hard, or if you sneeze, cough or do something else that makes you strain. Those gushes can catch you by surprise, but they are totally normal and most girls will have them every once in a while.

What should it LOOK like?

If you already knew something about your period before it started, you were probably expecting it to look like blood. What surprises most girls is that it doesn't always look like the blood you see when you get a cut or scrape.

Instead, period blood is usually dark red to brownish and sometimes it looks almost black.

Those colors are all of the same colors that you could see in a scab, and a scab is just dried up blood that gets old.



The older it is, the darker it is. So if the period coming out is fresh, it has a lighter color. If it has been in the uterus or vagina longer, it is darker. **All of those colors are normal.**



Sometimes, you may even have dark clumps of blood called **clots**. Clots are the consistency of old Jell-O. Clots happen when blood stays in one place for a while--like in your vagina.

You are most likely to see clots in the morning from the menstrual blood that has been in your vagina while you were lying down. If the clots are bigger than a quarter and you have them a lot, you need to let your mom or doctor know.

How long will it LAST?

Most periods last about three to seven days. It is normal to have a heavier flow of blood in the first couple days. Then your flow gets lighter toward the end.

Occasionally, some girls will bleed longer than a week. If your period lasts longer than ten days every month, or if one period lasts longer than two weeks, you should let your doctor know.



Will it HURT?

Since it involves blood, it seems only natural to think that your period might hurt.

For most girls, periods are NOT painful.

Sometimes, you might get a headache before or right after your period starts, but it usually goes away with some mild headache medicine. Sometimes, you may also get a stomach ache. When you are on your period and have pain in your lower stomach (which is also called your **pelvis**), it's called **menstrual cramps** or just "**cramps**." Occasionally the cramping can also feel like an ache around your vulva, upper thighs, or lower back.



CRAMPS happen because...

the uterus, which is made of **muscle**, squeezes to release the endometrial lining that makes up your period. As it squeezes, it can cramp just like any muscle that works hard. The **best treatments** for cramps are...

Get some
exercise

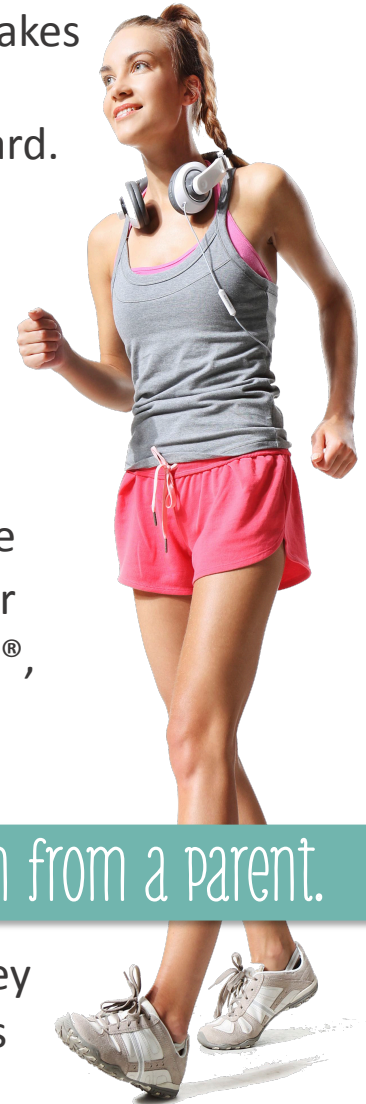
Take a
warm
bath

Use a
heating
pad

If none of these help, then you may want to take **medication**. We recommend either ibuprofen or naproxyn (their brand names are Motrin[®], Advil[®], or Aleve[®]). These medications are available at drugstores without a prescription.

Don't take any medication without permission from a parent.

Other products sold at drugstores may claim they are for “premenstrual symptoms” (which means bloating, cramps, and headaches). Interestingly, many of these products contain caffeine and other ingredients that aren't necessary. These products don't work as well for cramps as the medications we mentioned above, so read the label to make sure you are getting the best treatment.



CHAPTER 3:

Fem Care Stuff

Of course, you will need supplies to help “take care of your flow.” That’s how you keep blood off your clothes and sheets.

The supplies you’ll need are called

menstrual hygiene products or
feminine care products
or just “**fem care.**”

Those are strangely fancy names for things that hang out in your underwear.

And to make it more complicated, there are lots of different brands each with lots of different sizes and shapes and even different types of packaging (quiet, perfumed, biodegradable).

Having so many choices can make it seem confusing...

You will probably want to try different sizes and brands to choose those you like best. There are some brands made just for teens.





All about PADS

Most girls prefer to use a “pad” with their first period. A pad, also called a **sanitary napkin** (who came up with that horrible name?), is an oval or rectangular cottony pad that fits in your underwear and absorbs the menstrual blood as it comes out.

Pads are made with an adhesive strip that holds them in the crotch of your underwear. Just unwrap the pad, pull off the paper that covers the adhesive strip, and put the pad in your underwear. As you pull up your underwear, you’ll want to make sure the pad is positioned so it is centered below your vagina in the crotch of your underwear. If it is too far forward or backward, it might miss some of the flow.

Ouch!

The sticky side of the pad goes against your underwear! (not you).

Pads with **“wings”** were invented to help prevent the overflow that may happen when a pad bunches up in the middle. Sometimes a lot of running or other physical activity will make your pad bunch up so that your menstrual flow goes over the edge and stains your underwear.

Wings are extra flaps with their own adhesive strips that wrap around the crotch of your underwear. This keeps the blood from getting on the edges of your underwear.



So many CHOICES...

Just like girls come in different sizes and shapes, there are pads in different sizes and shapes to match your body type and your flow. There are shorter pads for petite girls and longer pads for bigger or taller girls. And then, there are the **minis**, the **maxis**, the **supers**, and the **lights**.

How's a girl to choose?

You'll just have to try a few to find your favorites. Here is a list of some of the types you'll find in that special aisle at the store.

Panty liners.

These are really thin pads that work for very light bleeding (also called "spotting") -- like you'll have toward the end of your period. Some girls also like to use these for the vaginal discharge they have between periods.

Mini- or light-pads.

These pads are a little thicker than a panty liner. They are best for light to normal menstrual flow.

Maxi- or Super-pads

Maxi pads are bigger, and/or extra-absorbent. They may feel thicker, but some are still pretty thin. They sure come in handy when your period is the heaviest.

Overnight pads

As you can imagine, when you lie down your flow can run in different directions. Overnight pads are longer and bigger to help cover a larger "area" while you sleep. Some girls just use a regular pad at night. It depends on you and your flow - and maybe how much you move around in your sleep.

Reusable pads

For the environmentally conscious girl, reusable pads are made of cotton and are washable. They are better for the environment because they can be washed and reused, and they are usually made of organic materials. They may be hard to find, but most health food or natural food stores carry them. They are also available through catalogs and online.



HOW LONG do pads last?

You already know your period will last three to seven days. Pads only last two to seven **hours** depending on your flow. Your pad probably will not be completely covered in blood, but once the center of it gets pretty full, it's time to change.

Also, don't wear the pad so long that it starts to feel soaked or soggy. Pads are made to pull the moisture away from your skin. When your pad starts to feel wet or full, it's time to change

What to DO when you're done

Can you flush them down the toilet? NO! Do you just toss them in the trash? Well, sort of. First, you should **wrap it up** – either in the wrapper of your new pad, in toilet paper or some other type of paper. THEN, you put it in the trash. **Nobody wants to see your dirty pads**, so wrapping them up is just polite.

At home, it's helpful to keep a trashcan near your toilet. You should empty your trashcan often when it contains used pads. If you leave them too long, they will start to have a strong smell. Got a dog?

Take the trash out even more often! It can be embarrassing to have your dog prancing around with your old pads in his mouth...YUCK!!

At school or out in public, most bathroom stalls have a special small trash **container on the stall wall** for used pads.

Ahhhh! So that's what it's for! You thought it was just for used gum, didn't you? Now you know!



Tampons

Sometimes, a pad just won't do the job you need it to do, but a **tampon** will. Tampons are small compact cylinder-shaped tubes made of cotton or other absorbent fibers. They fit inside the vagina and absorb the menstrual flow as it comes out of the uterus. It may sound like it would be uncomfortable, but if a tampon is put in correctly, **you won't even feel it.**

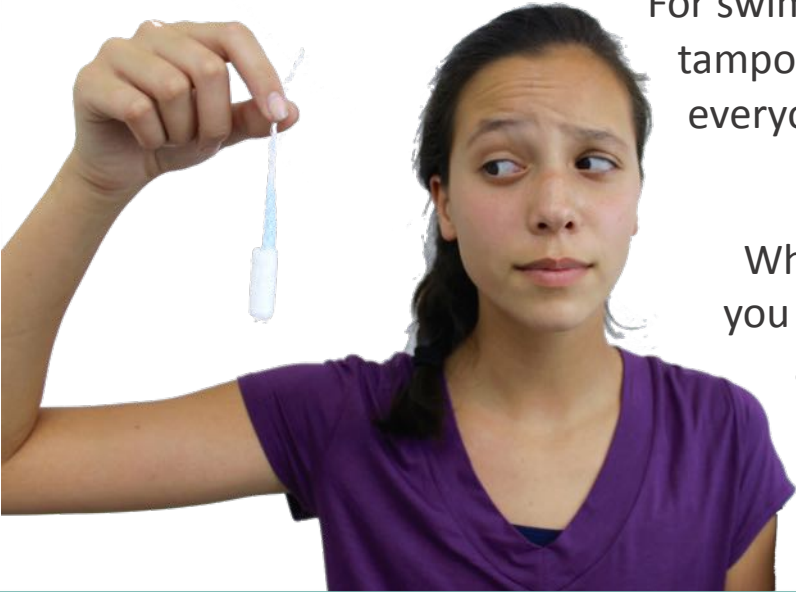
Why on earth would you want to use a tampon?
Tampons are nice because you can swim or do other activities without having to worry about a bulky pad.

For swimmers, dancers, and gymnasts, tampons are sometimes necessary. For everyone else, it just another option.

It's totally up to you.

What if you are an ace swimmer and you start your period the day before a huge meet? Do you have to skip the meet? **No way.**

You can use a tampon with your very first period if you want.

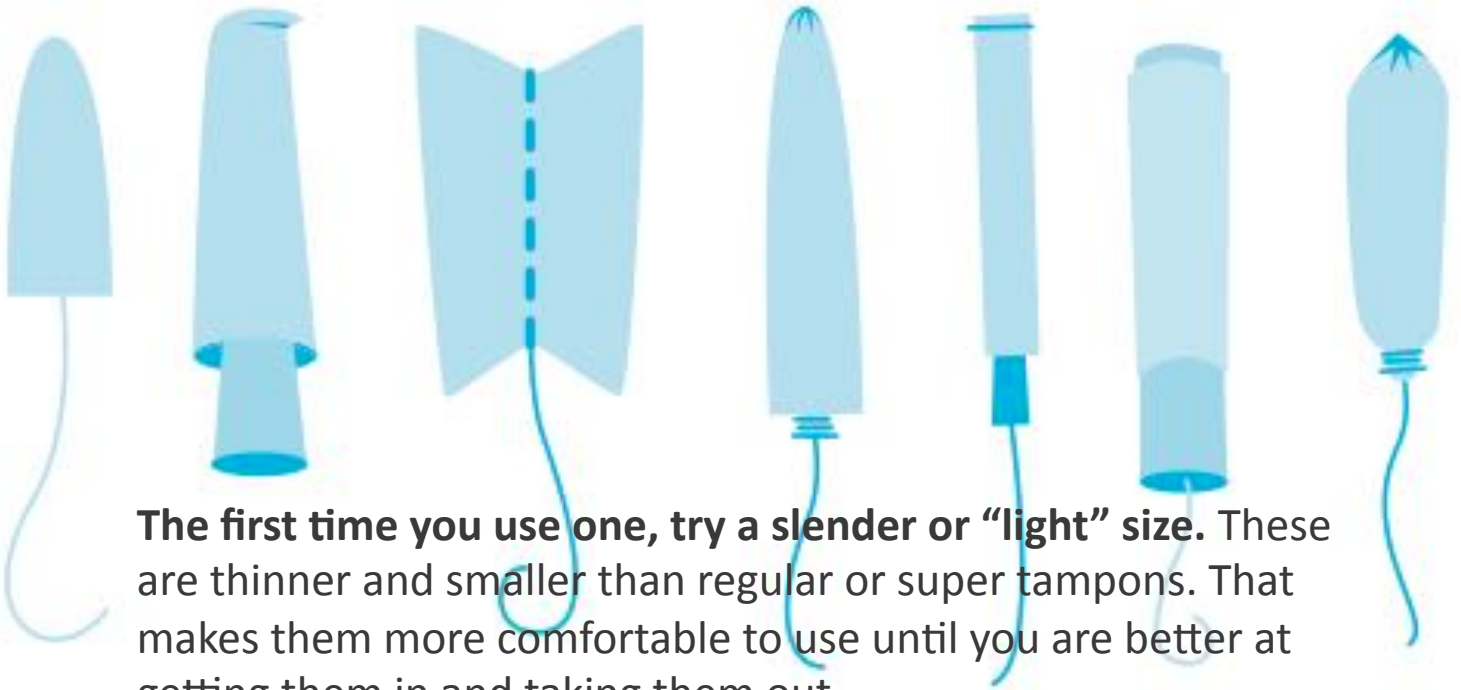


Your period doesn't need to stop you from doing any of your usual activities.

If you don't have an "emergency" need for a tampon, most girls like to try their first tampon after they have had a couple periods.

More CHOICES...

As you might expect, there are different sizes and shapes of tampons--just like there are pads!



The first time you use one, try a slender or “light” size. These are thinner and smaller than regular or super tampons. That makes them more comfortable to use until you are better at getting them in and taking them out.

The **light** tampons are for lighter flows.

The **regulars** are for normal flow.

The **super** and **super-plus** are for really heavy flows.

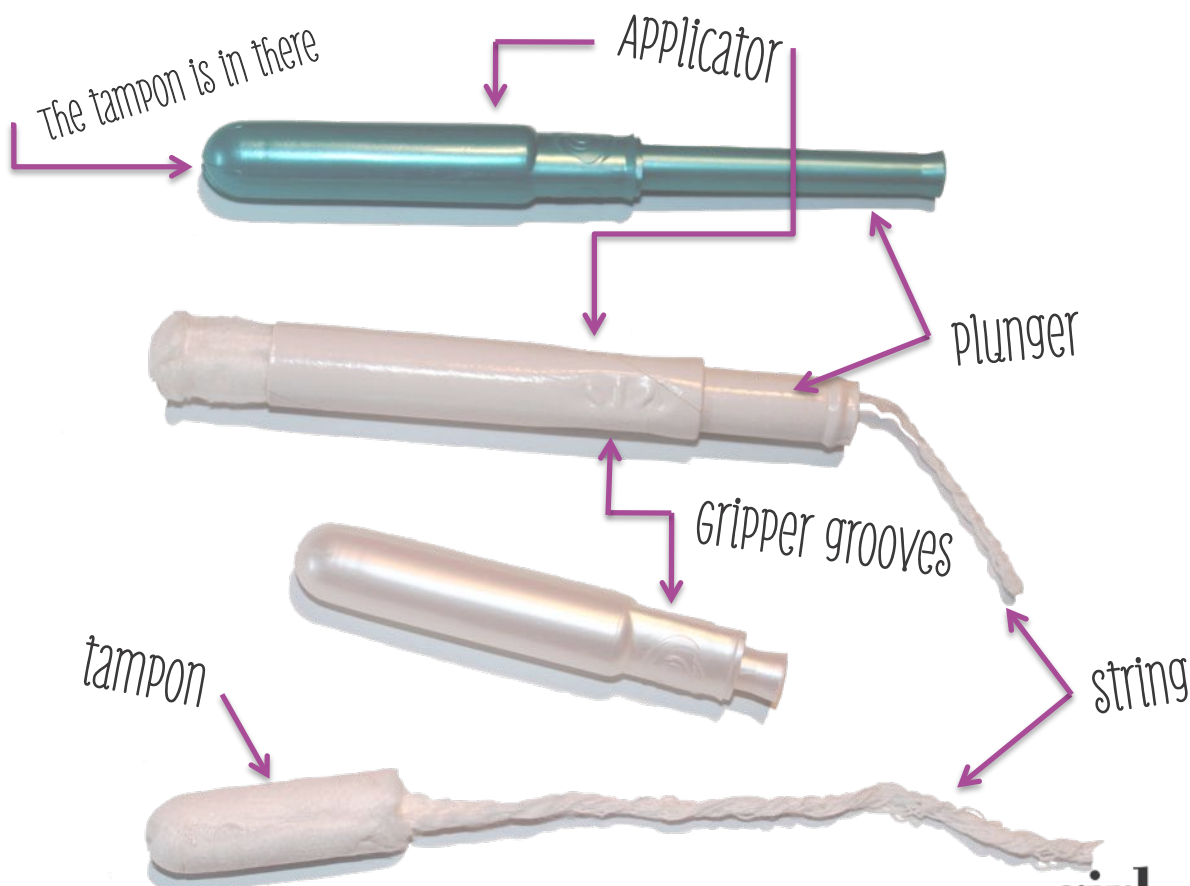
They all will fit in a normal vagina, but it’s a good idea to start with the smallest ones.

If you are buying tampons, there is no need to get the deodorized ones. Blood has no odor while it is inside the vagina. With tampons, the blood stays in the vagina on the tampon until you change it. The deodorized tampons are pretty useless and the perfumes used on them have chemicals that can be irritating.

How to INSERT a tampon

You insert a tampon into your vagina using something called an **applicator**. An applicator is made of smooth cardboard or plastic and helps you slide the tampon into your vagina. The first time you use one, you may need help from your mom or big sister or even a friend who has used one. Some girls do fine by themselves after reading the instructions. A **mirror** can help, too. It sounds scary to put something in your vagina, but once you learn how to use a tampon, it's easy! You won't hurt yourself because you are in control of inserting it.

First you need to know the parts of the tampon.



You can do it. Here's HOW.

1 Find a **position** that lets you comfortably reach your vagina. You may want to sit on the toilet, squat, or lie down.



2 Take the tampon out of its wrapper, and do your best to **relax** – *that means don't squeeze your butt.*

3 **Find** your vaginal opening using a mirror or your finger.

4 **Hold** the tampon on the gripper grooves using your thumb and middle finger....like this:

5 **Insert** the tampon gently into your vagina and **aim** it toward your lower back. That's the normal angle of the vagina (not straight up).



6 Push it in until your fingers (holding the grooves) **touch** your vulva.

7 Push the plunger all the way in (using your pointer finger on the same hand, or use your other hand to help).

8 Pull the applicator out.

ta da !!!

9 Your tampon will be in your vagina, and the string will be on the outside.

If you're having TROUBLE...

When the tampon doesn't go in on the first try, there are a few things you can try:

Relax more

Try again later or when your flow is heavier

Put a small dab of **lubricant** (slimy stuff you can buy in the fem care aisle) on the very tip of it to help it slide in. Don't use Vaseline® or lotion. Only use a lubricant that is made for use in the vagina.

Let your **mom** (or another experienced tampon user) help you by sitting behind you and reaching around to help guide your hand as you insert it together.



You'll KNOW if you have the tampon in correctly by the way it feels.

If you can't feel it, it's in right. If it's uncomfortable and makes you want to waddle when you walk, you didn't get it far enough into your vagina. You can either use your finger to push it in higher, or pull it out and start over with a new tampon.

How long will it last?

You can't look at a tampon to see when it is getting full (because it is inside you). Instead, you have to judge by the way it feels, or just change your tampons regularly. When a tampon gets full, the menstrual flow will soak the string and may even leak out onto your underwear. For that reason, some girls like to wear a mini-pad along with a tampon until they are more confident using them. Even if it's not leaking or feeling full, you should not wear a tampon more than 6-8 hours.



it's normal to change your tampon every 4-6 hours

To get it OUT just pull slowly but firmly on the string. Don't worry: the string won't break. Even if it did, your vagina is sort of a "dead end," so a tampon cannot get lost inside your body.



Don't FLUSH them!

Like with pads,
WRAP and TOSS.
And don't forget to take out
your trash. Otherwise...



Are Tampons DANGEROUS?

Tampons are not dangerous if they are used properly. However, tampon use has been related to a rare but very serious infection called **toxic shock syndrome (TSS)**. The truth is, you are more likely to be struck by lightning than you are to get TSS.

However, just like you know that you shouldn't go out into a lightning storm with a golf club in the air, there are some things you need to know about tampons to help decrease the chances of getting TSS.

Tampons are very safe if you are using them correctly.

Here are the **guidelines** for girls & young teens

- Use the **smallest size (lightest)** tampon that will control your flow. Tampons have an absorbency rating (on the box) that tells you if it is for light or heavy flow. If you take out a tampon and it's still mostly white, you need to use a less absorbent one next time.
- Don't wear a tampon more than **6-8 hours**.
- Try not to use tampons all day and all night. We recommend using a pad for at least 6-8 hours per day – like when you sleep or when you're hanging around the house. It's also best to **avoid sleeping in tampons**.
- Know the **symptoms of TSS**: high fever, nausea, diarrhea, rash, or other symptoms like the flu. If you get these while you are on your period and using a tampon, take out the tampon and go immediately to your closest ER. Make sure they know about your tampon use so they will consider TSS as they treat you.

CHAPTER 3:

Period Probs

Having a period may feel awkward at first, but it gets easier – especially when you know how to handle some of the **challenges** that it can cause. You will probably need help along the way, so don't hesitate to ask your mom, another woman you trust, or even your dad (yes, dads know about periods).

Here are some **tips** that might help make things easier

Surprise!

Wouldn't it be nice if you got a text telling you when to expect your period? Yeah, no. That doesn't happen. That means you will be caught by surprise sometimes.



Everyone has period accidents, not just you.



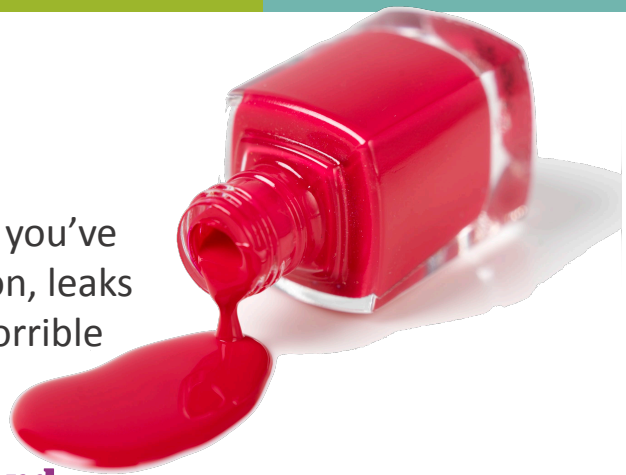
If you start your period, and don't have a pad handy, you can put some toilet paper in your underwear and head to the school health room or to your best friend for a pad. Toilet paper won't last long because it tends to "wander" away from where it's supposed to stay.

Leaks

Whether it's a surprise visit or you've overflowed your pad or tampon, leaks happen. And they can look horrible as you look into your underwear and clothing.

Before you freak out, **ask a friend** if the stain is visible on the outside of your clothes. A lot of period leaks look horrible to you, but people behind you can't even see it!

If it shows on your clothes, use a **sweater** or jacket to tie around your waist until you can get a change of clothes.



Stains

If you get blood on your clothes or sheets (and you will), wash them as soon as you can and use **cold water and soap**.

Hot water can make blood stains harder to get out. A brief washing by hand can get most of the stain out. The rest will usually come out in the laundry. If you have a large or heavy stain that is tough to get out, a mild chemical called **hydrogen peroxide** (you can buy it in a drugstore) can help dissolve the blood. **Ask a grown-up for help** using it because it can change or fade the color of some fabrics.

If you have a big mess, get help! **Don't use spray spot removers or bleach directly in your underwear**. These are harsh chemicals that can irritate the sensitive skin of your vulva and vagina.



Odors

A lot of girls worry that their period has an odor that others may notice.

Actually, **your period does NOT smell**. Any odor you notice is

mostly coming from sweat, and your pad absorbs sweat and body odor in addition to your flow. During puberty, you have new odors that are sprouting from those places with new hair – armpits and “down there.”

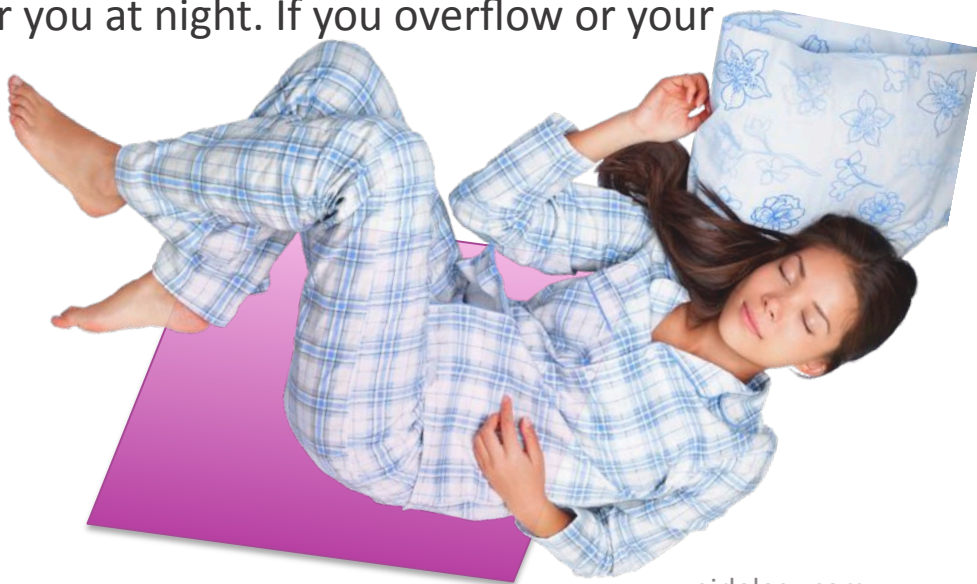
Washing daily with soap and water,

and changing your pad regularly will keep the body odor under control.



Night Time Accidents

If you're a wild sleeper or have a heavy flow, it can help to place a towel under you at night. If you overflow or your pad doesn't catch everything, you can just wash the towel instead of all of your sheets.



CHAPTER 4:

Planning Ahead

After your first period, you'll obviously want to know when to expect your next one. Your second period is always the hardest one to predict, but it will probably start anywhere from 3 weeks to 12 weeks after your first. The best way to predict all of your future periods is to keep them on a **calendar** so you can figure out how long you go between periods. After a few periods, you'll start to notice a **pattern**.

The calendar on the next page will help you understand your "**cycle length**" (that's the **number of days from the FIRST day of one period to the FIRST day of your next period**).

keeping up with your periods on a calendar is a GREAT idea!

Even though periods come about once a month, you won't get your period on the same day of every month (partly because months have different numbers of days in them). Instead, you'll find that your cycle length can switch a couple days shorter or longer from month to month.



If you are like most girls, your cycle length will be **no shorter than 21 days** and **no longer than 45 days**. For more details, check out our full length books.

The greatest PREDICTOR:

Name _____

Year _____

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CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
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nothing spotting light medium heavy

My Doctor:

My Medications:

www.girlology.com

Download a FREE copy of this calendar from our website.

Keep up with your periods on this calendar, and you'll be able to plan ahead for a whole year! If you think your periods are not regular, then you can take your calendar to your doctor to show her exactly what's been going on with your cycles. She will be so impressed that you are using this! And it will give her important information about your periods.

Thinking AHEAD

The future is always a mystery, but planning ahead is definitely smart. And it's especially important if you want to avoid frustrations that can happen when you get your period. Use this check list so you are prepared every time.



Check your Supply of fem care stuff.

- Make sure you have a couple pads or tampons in your backpack or locker at all times just in case you get a surprise visit from Aunt Flo.
- Make sure you have enough supplies at home to get through your next period. There's nothing more frustrating than reaching for a pad and finding an empty box! If you are running low, make sure the person who buys your period supplies knows that you need more and has time to get some!
- It's a great idea to keep a "period kit" handy for when you are away from home. Make sure it has several pads and/or tampons, some wet wipes (for clean up or for your hands if you are away from a restroom). Also, an extra pair of underwear and a ziplock bag (for the dirty ones) can come in handy for accidents.

Remember that you may get moody It's pretty common to have big emotions around the time you start each period. That means you may feel frustrated or angry more easily, and you may cry over things that don't usually make you cry. If you know that moods may be on the way, you usually handle those emotions better.

Don't get slack about skin care Washing your face is always important, but it becomes even more important around your period. That's when zits seem to pop out more than usual. If you are having period zits, it might be helpful to add some stronger acne cream to your daily routine.

CHAPTER 5:

Stay AWESOME

So, now you know what's going on and what to expect. No big deal, right? You've got this.

And you know what else?

There's nothing weird about it, and there's never any reason to be embarrassed about your period.

It's just normal stuff.

Some adults may get all sappy and say things like, "Awww. You're a young woman now."

We know. It makes us want to roll our eyes, too.

Having a period doesn't mean you have to act grown up.

You're still the same girl you've always been, right? It's just a period. Keep doing all the things you love to do. Aunt Flo doesn't have to change anything.

So, stay **positive**. Stay **awesome**.

www.girlology.com



And stay in touch!

If you have **questions**, if you want to **tell us** if this book was helpful, or if you just want to see what we're up to, visit us on our website or social media hang outs (girlology) where you can stay connected.

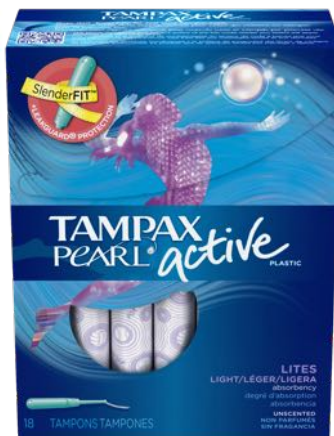


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