



FAQs for Responders

Frequently asked questions on the questions you're about to be frequently asked.



A hand with a blue knitted sleeve is holding a large yellow speech bubble shape against a pink background. The speech bubble contains text.

You probably already have a working knowledge of the menstrual cycle, and while we all have different topic preferences, personal experiences, and areas we're more comfortable speaking to, this document is here to help you as you answer questions on Lil-Lets Talk.

It's a quick reference when you need a little advice. Don't hesitate to read more on a topic and remember the **Lil-Lets website** is full of articles and information which you can reference and link to.

www.lil-lets.com/za/en/

General Guidance

**How to approach posting
answers on the platform and
tackling some tricky topics.**

● **How do I answer a question I'm unsure about?**

You don't! Lil-Lets Talk is driven by shared experience, so if you don't have any experience or knowledge of a particular topic, simply decline to answer it. We have a pool of Responders and Moderators all with different experience - some even with medical degrees - so don't feel like you need to go and Google an answer for something you're unsure of.

● **Can I reference other articles and websites?**

If there's a particular article or resource you think will be helpful for someone, feel free to reference it in your answer and add the link. In each section of this guide we've included some helpful resources. When sharing a link to an article or website, always make sure it's a reputable source with clear references. All links in answers will be vetted by the moderators.

● **May I speak about my personal experiences?**

Absolutely. There will be questions that tug on your heartstrings. Show concern - just always try to deescalate a situation rather than escalate it. For instance, if someone is worried they might be pregnant, it's not appropriate to jump in and offload your own thoughts on pregnancy. Provide support, answer questions and give guidance based on your experience.

● **I think this person might have a medical issue. What do I do?**

Remember you're not a doctor. So encourage them to see a real doctor, go to their local clinic or make an appointment with a gynaecologist. Or, simply leave the question for one of the Lil-Lets Talk medical professionals to respond to.

● **Can I bring my own preferences and opinion into the conversation?**

When appropriate. We all have our own biases, whether it's against a form of contraception or a particular sanitary product. Sometimes, other members want to know your opinion and preferences, other times, they just need comfort and support in making their own decisions. Your role is to help members make informed choices that work for them - so chat about your preferences when appropriate, but only in a way that is encouraging.

● How do I approach the “could I be pregnant” questions?

Remember that conceiving might be great news for one member who has been trying to fall pregnant, while for another it could be nightmarish. These two very different scenarios require different handling but because you don't always know the member's background, it's good to focus on the menstrual cycle, someone's symptoms and why they think they might be pregnant. Be careful about making any assumptions. If appropriate, ask if they're showing any of the early pregnancy signs and suggest taking a pregnancy test, especially if they've recently had unprotected sex..

● I'm not sure how to answer a question about yoni steaming. It's been dismissed by gynaecologists but the person posting the question says it worked for her?

While there may be no scientific evidence to back up someone's experience, it is important to take into account the lived experience of another person. We don't dismiss or ridicule something, but we do deal with the facts. We dissuade members from potentially dangerous or unhelpful practises but we support other menstruators as they seek comfort and support on their menstrual journey. How you respond should be grounded in your own experience rather than just your opinion on a topic. When in doubt, leave it to the senior moderators and medical professionals to respond.

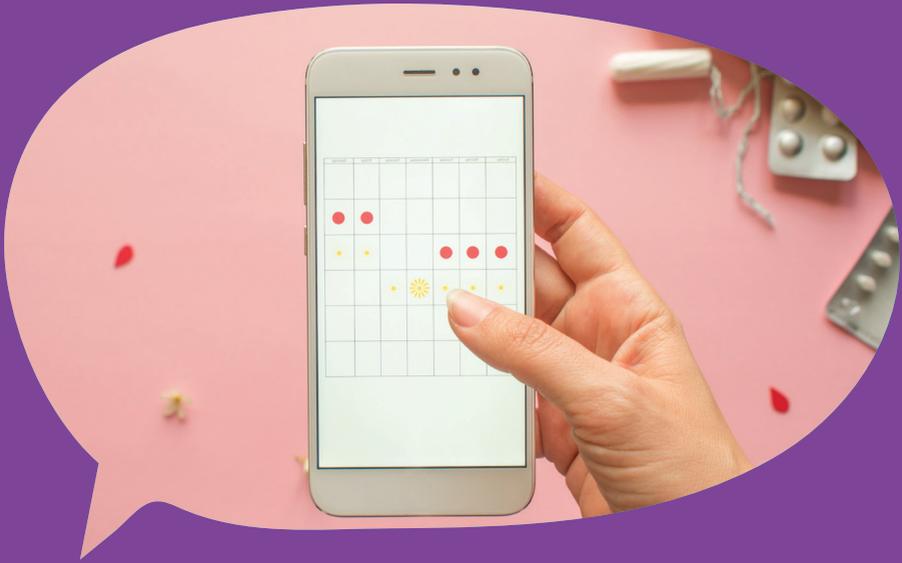
● A question is sexually explicit. Should I answer it?

Lil-Lets Talk is a space for open, frank conversations. We tell it like it is, but without being vulgar. That means using the correct names for body parts, for instance (vulva for external genitalia, vagina for birth canal), and respecting everybody's right to privacy and dignity. Also remember all questions and answers will go through moderation, so if the moderators find something that contravenes the community guidelines; these questions will be vetted.



FAQS

**Common questions on
Lil-Lets Talk and example
answers from Responders.**



Menstruation

Understanding each stage of the menstrual cycle, the hormone changes that cause it, and what to expect when.

What type of exercises are ideal during your period?

Binwe

My favourite question! So I did some research and apparently it's best to do low impact workouts. I push myself the most post-period cause I get this sudden burst of energy which is great for weights and ply (jumping). But during my period, some light weights or resistance band is good, or a slow yoga flow. Particularly the gut-focused yoga flows are great for alleviating gas, pain and belly inflammation. If you're interested in any of these let me know and I'll share some YouTube links :)

I don't get my period (I have an IUD), however, I spot brown discharge randomly during the month (I'm NOT pregnant). Also, why do I bleed / spot after intercourse?

Megan

Since you're not getting your period, a little bit of spotting isn't anything to be worried about, unless it's accompanied by physical discomfort or pain, or any other unusual symptoms that you haven't experienced before.

However, this combined with bleeding after sex makes me wonder if you shouldn't go to your doctor and chat about these symptoms - you may have a mild infection that's causing you to spot, or it may be that you're experiencing vaginal dryness, which can then contribute to friction and discomfort during intercourse, leading to postcoital bleeding.

While it's more than likely nothing to be worried about - and both of these things can be caused by hormones - I do think that it's an idea to see your doctor, just to make sure that everything's ok and that there isn't an underlying cause that requires medical attention. If you're interested in any of these let me know and I'll share some YouTube links :)

Is it normal to have diarrhea during your period?

Candice

Diarrhea aka Period Poop during periods is a pretty common thing. The hormone progesterone and prostaglandins during your period can make the smooth muscle in your intestines more or less active. It's not worrisome unless it causes such severe gastrointestinal pain that it keeps you from leaving your home.

Why is your period blood different colours?

Vicki

Menstrual blood will differ in colour depending on what day of your period you are on and how long the fluid has been lining the uterus. No matter what the colour, be it red, brown, orange or even pink, it's still your period and not a sign of any problems.

Megan

You'd think that our period blood would be one colour, all the time, right? I mean, when I think of blood - I think of bright red fluid. But period blood, or menstrual fluid, is a lot more than just blood: your body is discarding the endometrium which hasn't been fertilised, as well as unfertilised ovums.

Your period can go from a light red to a very deep red, which is when you're probably experiencing your heaviest flow. There may also be clots that are close to black in colour, and can change to a brown-y colour toward the end of your period. All of these colours are pretty normal and to be expected. Remember that while it may look concerning, brown blood is normal, and is actually just blood that has been exposed to oxygen (think of an old blood stain on fabric that's turned brown). This is a really great article that decodes period colours: <https://helloclue.com/articles/cycle-a-z/period-blood-color-brown-black-dark-does-it-matter>

What causes a heavy flow?

Candice

Because each person's period is unique, it can be tricky to know if your "normal" period is actually considered to be excessive bleeding. Heavy menstruation may be caused by a thicker than average uterine lining, and by hormonal imbalances. While not all heavy periods are a cause for concern, there are certain medical conditions, such as PCOS and endometriosis, that can cause menorrhagia. As always, if you're worried or feel like your heavy period is disrupting your life, it's best to make an appointment to see your doctor.

Vicki

For half of all women who experience a heavy flow there is no underlying cause this is simply how their period is for them and this can be based on a number of things, such as hormone levels or the type of contraception used. It's difficult to define what would be classed as a heavy period because we are all different, heavy menstrual bleeding is defined as losing 80ml or more in each period, having periods that last longer than 7 days or a combination of both.

A good indication of a heavy flow is if you need to change your period products every 2 hours or less or if you are passing large clots, again these are not always a sign that a medical issue is present, but if they start to impact on your daily life you may want to chat to your doctor who will advise you further.



Further reading

- Irregular periods
- Period pain
- The menstrual cycle
- Periods at night
- Ovulation and fertility



PMS

**Sore breasts, breakouts and mood swings
are all symptoms of premenstrual syndrome (PMS).**

Is it normal to have mood swings a week before your period or am I just going crazy?

Megan

It's absolutely normal and is a symptom of PMS, or premenstrual syndrome. Most people find that their moods tend to settle down once they start their periods, but you're definitely not alone in feeling all over the place emotionally in the days leading up to your period.

What remedies can one use for period pains?

Vicki

Period pains can have such an impact on our lives, making it difficult to carry on with daily life. Always start with the most natural remedies, such as keeping active (we're not saying you should run a marathon here) a brisk walk, yoga, even a dance in the kitchen to your favourite tunes can help ease cramps. Then there are heat pads or ice packs, both can help ease cramps when placed on the lower abdomen or back. Finally, if these are not helping then you could consider pain relief, but always follow the guidelines for dosage.

Candice

Sipping chamomile tea helps reduce menstrual cramps. It also helps deal with bloating, nausea, vomiting, and headache. Taking a warm hot bath can help soothe pain and relax tense muscles. Taking a bath can help you unwind and prepare you for a good night's rest.

What is the best way to deal with period pain?

Binave

In some ways this is a person-specific question. Ibuprofen is a great pain medication to take if you are experiencing menstrual cramps as are heat patches. There are a range of over the counter painkiller options for a range of pain needs so it's best to describe your pain to your pharmacist or doctor and let them advise you.

Also bear in mind any sensitivities - I had a friend once recommend a pain pill to me and it turned out I was allergic to one of the ingredients, so please disclose any allergies to your pharmacist when you chat to them. In the meantime I'd also suggest a hot water bottle, some gentle stretching if you can handle it, and some ginger tea to settle the tummy.

Does anyone else suffer from intense breast pain before your period? Any trusted solutions for this?

Candice

I experience this too! I find that cutting back on salt and caffeine during PMS and my period helps alleviate this as salt and coffee increase water retention that leads to the breasts feeling like heavy water balloons. I also find taking the right vitamins like Vitamin E, and magnesium can help soothe the PMS symptoms.

Vicki

Just before your period, hormone levels can drop and this can often lead to breast tenderness. A bra that offers support will help with any discomfort and some people find a close fitting sports bra does the trick.



Further reading

- **Mood swings**
- **PMS and PMDD**



Intimate Hygiene

Questions and concerns about staying fresh, clean and confident every day, no matter the time of the month.

People with vaginas are constantly worrying about their potential bodily odours. It's our job to normalise vaginas and vulvas not smelling like roses, and to reassure menstruators that they're not dirty or abnormal. We provide the parameters of what's considered healthy and normal and advise if someone is experiencing an odour that could be a sign of possible infection.

Abnormal:

Fishy smell accompanied by grey, green or yellow frothy discharge:

Sometimes a sign of Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) or trichomoniasis.

Strong yeasty odour:

Sign of yeast infection.

Rotten smell:

Serious infection or sign of a tampon being left in for too long.



How do I know if I'm 'normal' down there?

Binave

This is a great question, and one I think can be hard to ask, so thank you for posting! I think seeing and smelling your own vagina is very useful - it's always good to know what is happening down there. Particularly during (and a couple days after) your period, because you're passing blood, a coppery, metallic odour is not at all abnormal.

At other times, the vagina may smell musky or tangy - this could be linked to PH balance (level of acidity) of the vagina and it's not necessarily cause for concern - there is no single, perfect smell. That said, if there's a persistent smell that makes even you go 'Woah hectic!' or a smell is accompanied by itching, burning, pain, heavy discharge then it's probably time to chat to your doctor.

Scented pantyliners irritate my skin. Please help.

Candice

It might be best to switch to unscented products, as you're probably experiencing a reaction to the pantyliner. Also, be sure to change your pantyliner regularly and as soon as it gets moist, as the moisture can also contribute to the irritation.

Is it safe to use intimate washes when on your period?

Lil-Lets

Intimate washes can be used at any time of the month and are especially useful when on your period and you want to feel clean and fresh. The Lil-Lets Intimate Care Gel and Creme washes are paraben and soap-free, pH balanced and gentle enough to use every day of your cycle, including during your period.

What's the right way to wash your vagina?

Kath

First things first, let's be clear on what's what down there. Your vagina doesn't need to be cleaned - your vulva does though. The vulva is the outer part of the vagina - including your labia. The vagina is self cleaning and best left to do its thing - it has a very delicate pH balance which shouldn't be messed with. Wash your vulva with warm water and your hands or a clean wash cloth to gently clean around the skin folds. You can also use a soap-free, pH balanced, non-perfumed, gentle wash.

I've heard that some undies cause yeast infections or make you smell very bad down there because your vagina can't breathe. So which underwear can we buy to prevent that?

Megan

You're absolutely right that some underwear is better to wear than others. Since we experience discharge from our vaginas, which already has a very specific pH balance, it's best to wear natural, breathable fabrics that are also absorbent and yes - let your vagina breathe. Your best bet is 100% cotton underwear, in whichever style you find most comfortable.

Vicki

Yes, personally I recommend cotton underwear is breathable and wicks away moisture. Also keep some feminine wipes for everyday freshness in your bag. Perfectly safe to use on your vagina area.

I'm still so unsure of what is normal and what isn't when it comes to discharge. Am I the only one?

Binave

There is so much misinformation out there and even with access to info, education and insight, we still worry and shame ourselves - particularly when it comes to what it looks and smells like down there. Particularly when it comes to (heterosexual) sex and how the guy feels about it. At the end of the day a vagina should smell like a vagina. Don't feel pressure to give any man a flowery bed of roses and perfume at the expense of your vaginal health. Thanks for coming to my TEDTalk ;)

What causes a bad smell during menstruation?

Vicki

Blood barely carries any odour when in the body, it is only when the blood is released and comes into contact with the air that bacteria starts from leaving an unpleasant odour. For this reason we advise changing your pad every 3-5 hours, even better if you can use tampons as they capture fluid from inside the body and significantly reduce odour.

Megan

Menstrual fluid does have its own unique smell that's different to everyday discharge, and that's totally normal for everyone, even though it can make you feel a little self-conscious. To feel as fresh as possible, change your pad and tampon often, change your underwear if you experience leaking or a spill and wash your vulva thoroughly with warm water at bath / shower time.

Can the volume and colour of my discharge say something about my health? What is normal discharge, actually?

Kath

Discharge is a very normal and healthy part of your menstrual cycle - it's your vagina's way of cleaning itself and protecting itself against infection. What's normal though depends on you and your body and where you are in your cycle. Some people just have more daily discharge than others - just like some people sweat more than others. Normal discharge can vary from being clear (like egg white) to cloudy, thicker and white or pale yellow.

You can deal with discharge on a daily basis simply by maintaining good hygiene and wearing pantyliners to protect your underwear. Just change your pantyliner regularly or whenever it gets moist. Intimate Wipes are also life-changing.

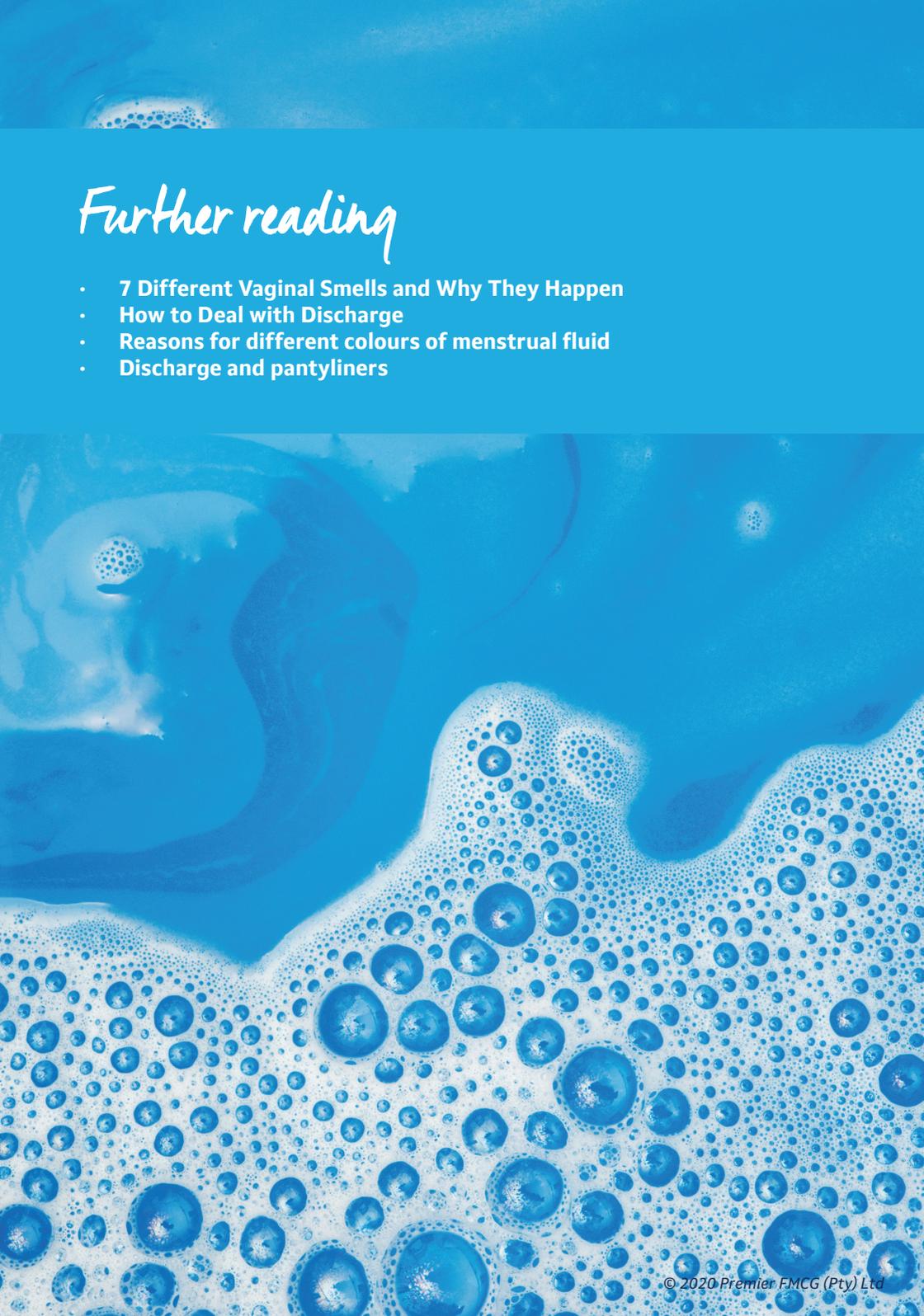
If you notice discharge that's grey, green, or has a cottage-cheese-like consistency, or a bad fishy smell, it can be a sign of an underlying problem like a yeast infection or bacterial vaginosis which can be easily treated with the right diagnosis and over the counter medication.

Megan

The colour of your discharge can indicate both your current state of health and where you are in your menstrual cycle. Discharge can range from a clear, sticky fluid that is almost elastic (around the time that you're ovulating) to a more creamy colour (off white to light yellow is considered healthy). If it's mild smelling and not accompanied by any pain, irritation, itching or other symptoms, and if your discharge tends to be one of the above colours, there's nothing to worry about.

Should you experience discharge that is grey or yellow-green, and accompanied by a powerful odour and irritation or pain, see your doctor as soon as possible. This can be a sign of infection that can easily be cleared up with the right treatment. Any change in the texture, smell, colour and volume of discharge that is accompanied by discomfort and pelvic pain is a sign that you should go to your doctor, as well.

Remember that everybody is different, and what is normal for one person's body may vary slightly from person to person. The key is to be aware of what your 'normal' is you're quick to pick up if something is a little off.



Further reading

- [7 Different Vaginal Smells and Why They Happen](#)
- [How to Deal with Discharge](#)
- [Reasons for different colours of menstrual fluid](#)
- [Discharge and pantyliners](#)



Issues & Conditions

When you know something isn't right, chances are, someone else has been through it too. This is where we help members understand different issues and conditions, symptoms and treatment options by sharing our experiences.

When people complain of heavy, prolonged bleeding, extremely painful cramps, missing school or work because of their period or having irregular periods quite often, it could be that they're suffering from a medical condition. As Responders, we don't diagnose or give medical advice, but rather guide and offer information and support and to encourage people to seek medical attention where necessary.

I would like to know a little bit more about PCOS and what it feels like for the people who have it?



Megan

PCOS is different for everybody but for me, it's characterised by a general feeling of discomfort and being 'unwell'. It's been difficult for me to get a diagnosis since I didn't know that my heavy, painful periods were out of the ordinary but after I had my child, the symptoms became much more pronounced.

I struggled with hormonal acne that just wouldn't go away, despite multiple trips to the dermatologist (caused by my oily skin which is typical for PCOS). My hair thinned dramatically. Although I've been fortunate to not have unwanted body hair, even my eyebrows were thinning!

My mental health was really bad: I've always had depression but PCOS was causing me to have uncontrollable mood swings that were quite distressing - this is the work of the hormone imbalance, as well as the insulin resistance which is typical for PCOS.

Many people with PCOS are insulin resistant, so I have to be careful with sugar (which affects everything from my mood to my energy levels). If I don't eat well and don't exercise enough I can be bed-ridden for days at a time due to exhaustion and pain in my ovaries. Some people with PCOS are prescribed Metformin, which is a medication for diabetes, since your risk of becoming diabetic later on is much greater.

The bloating is severe, and it seems, at least for me, that there are food intolerances that seem to worsen when you have a PCOS 'flair'.

PCOS is a hormonal disorder which affects your ovaries and causes small cysts to develop. When I had my first ultrasound for my PCOS diagnosis, it looked like bunches of grapes on both my ovaries!!! and to be honest, it just always feels like I have some kind of abdominal pain. If it isn't my digestion being affected, it's a dull ache deep in my abdomen and sometimes, a tearing feeling, which I think is when the cysts burst. Joy.

It's not all bad though, many PCOS sufferers find great relief in taking the correct birth control pills (PCOS sufferers tend to fare better on progesterone-only pills, not combination).

My advice to anybody who suspects they may have PCOS? If you ever have a niggling feeling that something is just 'not right', trust your gut. Especially if you're having inexplicable aches and pains and suffering from exhaustion more often than normal.

How do you treat a yeast infection?

Vicki

You can generally treat vaginal infections such as Thrush with over the counter medications from your local pharmacy. Or if you have visited your doctor or gynae they will prescribe treatment for you.

Megan

Pharmacists are life savers when it comes to yeast infections / thrush! You can just pop over and tell them what you're experiencing and you can get over the counter medication that should clear it up in no time. Try to wear only cotton underwear during this time so that your body can breathe.

Kath

Yeast infections are caused by an imbalance in the naturally occurring bacteria in the vaginal area. While the most common causes are the use of antibiotics (which kill the good bacteria that keep the other bacteria under control), a diet of too much sugar, or stress and hormone imbalances, yeast infections can also be caused by an excessively moist environment and poor hygiene. So it's really important to change both pads and tampons regularly. If you use pantyliners, they should also be changed as soon as they get moist to keep the vaginal area dry.

How can I best support a friend of mine that has endometriosis?

Vicki

Endometriosis is a challenging and long suffering illness that impacts not only on the individual's overall health, but their family life too. It's lovely to hear you want to support your friend through these difficult times, and I am sure you already understand this is an unpredictable condition.

Your friend may be fine one week and want to go out and enjoy life, only to come crashing down the following week in crippling discomfort, so be flexible if plans need to be rearranged.

Learn all you can about Endometriosis so you are better informed and can possibly educate other friends and family members, but remember you are not an expert and very often those suffering will not want to know your views, solutions and any stories you may have heard about others. Being educated on a subject simply means you can empathise and be there quietly and supportively.

Finally, be practical, if household chores are something your friend can simply not contemplate, offer to do a few off her list.

Further reading

- **Lil-Lets: Endometriosis, Explained**
- **Healthline: Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS): Symptoms, Causes, and Treatment**
- **Healthline: Bacterial Vaginosis Is Extremely Common — Here's What You Need to Know**
- **Hello Clue: Yeast infection 101: Symptoms & Treatment**
- **Intimate hygiene**
- **Toxic shock syndrome**
- **Heavy periods**



S E X

Sex

We believe in open, honest and empowering conversations about safe sex, anytime of the month. There are a lot of questions about having sex on one's period, libido during menstruation, and if it's safe to have sex when you're menstruating. Here are some examples of how Responders have answered them.

I wanted to know if it's possible for me to get pregnant while on my period or 5 days after my period? When is it actually dangerous to have sex after your period?

Binwe

There are no absolutes so it is always best to err on the side of caution. While your fertility is at its lowest and your endometrium is being shed, it is still possible.

Vicki

Your most fertile time is around days 12-14 of your cycle and whilst it is unusual for someone to get pregnant when on their period it does happen, especially if your cycle is irregular and you are not on any form of contraception.

Is it safe to have sex during my period?

Candice

It is totally safe to have sex during your period, as long as you're also practising safe sex.

Megan

I love this question so much and I feel like every time someone broaches the topic of period sex, a bunch of people get to walk away from the conversation with the potential to have much happier, sexier periods (which is totally possible, with period sex). Just lay down some towels, make sure you're comfortable and, practise safe sex. Also, it's important to remember that while it's less probable, it's not impossible to fall pregnant if you have unprotected sex when you're on your period. If you and your partner(s) are comfortable, then why not?



Tampons

We get a lot of questions from first-time tampon users and people who have had difficulty using them. There are concerns about virginity and other taboos. While we may all hold different beliefs regarding virginity as a social construct, we reassure people that tampons are safe for all ages and stages, and that it's a personal choice to use them.

Answers straight from the Lil-Lets team...

What is the best age to start using tampons?



There's no minimum age to start using a tampon. You can start using them as soon as you have your first period. It may take some practice to insert it properly the first time, so it's best to try it in a place where you are relaxed and comfortable.

Does it hurt to use tampons for the first time?



If you choose the right size and insert it correctly, you shouldn't feel any pain, or even feel the tampon inside you at all. It may take some practice to insert it properly the first time, so it's best to try it in a place where you are relaxed and comfortable. You can also start out by trying a smaller applicator tampon (like the ones in the Lil-Lets Mini range) at first until you get the hang of it.

Is it normal to never use a tampon / pad?



Lil-Lets has a wide range of both pads and tampons so you can choose what is right for YOU, and what makes you the most comfortable. It's completely okay to never use a tampon or a pad – the choice is yours.

Can I sleep with a tampon?



Yes, you can sleep with a tampon. Just insert a new one right before going to bed, and replace it immediately after you wake up. A tampon can be worn for up to eight hours, depending on your flow (if you're having a heavy day, you may need to change tampons more frequently).

Can a tampon fall out? For example, while I'm playing sports.



If properly inserted, your tampon is held in place by your vaginal muscles and will not fall out.

Are tampons better than pads?



The only thing that matters is what makes you feel the most comfortable. Some women prefer pads, others prefer tampons. Lil-Lets has a wide range of both pads and tampons so you can choose what's right for YOU. That said, a lot of people prefer tampons to pads because when inserted properly, you can't feel a tampon - which can make your period more comfortable and fuss-free. Tampons can also give you the freedom to swim and play sports confidently, without worrying about your period.

Can you use a tampon for discharge?



Tampons are designed to absorb menstrual blood and are not meant for discharge. A Lil-Lets pantyliner would be a better choice to keep you feeling fresh every day.

Can you put two tampons in at once?



No, you should only use one tampon at a time. If you are finding you are leaking through, switch to a higher absorbency tampon or change your tampon more often. You can also use a pantyliner if you are cautious of leaks.

How do I dispose of my pads and/or tampons?



The best way to dispose of your used tampon or pad is to wrap it up in some toilet paper, a tissue or a sanitary bag (sometimes found in a public loo) and throw it in the bin. Tampons and pads can't break up like toilet paper so they should never be flushed.

I always leak through tampons, even though I use tampons made for a heavy flow. What can I do?



Make sure you are changing your tampon regularly. You can also try a pantyliner for extra protection. If you are bleeding through a high-absorbency tampon within an hour or two, it might be best to book an appointment with a doctor or gynaecologist. A very heavy flow can sometimes be an indicator of another problem.

What size tampon must I use?



This will depend on your flow and where you are in your cycle. If you find that your tampon still has a lot of white on it (is relatively dry) when you remove it after 4-8 hours, then you should try a smaller tampon with a lower absorbency. If you find you are bleeding through within 4 hours, then you should try a tampon that is bigger and more absorbent. We have a wide range of tampon absorbencies so you can find the ones that work best for your flow.

Can I pee with my tampon in?



Yes of course! Urine leaves your body through the urethra while menstrual blood comes out of your vagina. Your urethra is located just above your vagina and is completely separate. Just move the string to the side before you pee.

How do I know if I have Toxic Shock Syndrome?



Toxic Shock Syndrome is extremely rare, but it can happen. If you have a sudden fever, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting, and a rash or redness near your eyes, mouth and throat, we urge you to see a doctor or medical professional as soon as possible. You can read more about TSS here: <https://www.lil-lets.com/za/en/the-menstrual-cycle/what-is-toxic-shock-syndrome/>

Answers from Lil-Lets Talk...

I am struggling to insert my tampon. Can you help?

Kath

Inserting a tampon for the first time can be tricky but it gets easier, I promise. It's easiest to insert a tampon when your flow is heaviest. Some women find applicator tampons easier to start with as they have a smooth surface and help to guide the tampon to the right spot. You can also try a water-based lubricant to help make things easier. If you haven't already, check out our video on how to insert a tampon here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2g-toW048sk&feature=emb_logo. Keep trying – once you get it right, you'll be so glad you did.

Can I use a tampon if I'm a virgin? Will a tampon take my virginity?

Rachael

Tampons are a great option for anyone, irrespective of their sexual experience. A virgin is someone who has not had sex for the first time so a tampon can't affect your virginity. You can start using tampons at any time as long as you feel comfortable and ready. It may take some practice to insert it properly at first (and that's totally normal), so it's best to try it in a place where you are relaxed and comfortable. You may also want to start out with a smaller or lower absorbency applicator tampon. These helped me so much when I was new to tampons.

Vicki

This is a great question and one that people often worry about. The hymen actually doesn't break (this is a bit of a myth) it stretches... and if you have already been using tampons successfully then your hymen most likely will have already stretched to accommodate tampon usage. You may be interested to learn that the size of a higher absorbency tampon is not so different to lower absorbency tampons in diameter and I'm sure you already know it's important to use a variety of absorbencies to manage your flow, so yes give heavier flow tampons a go. Finally, using tampons of any absorbency has no impact on your virginity.

Why are tampons hard to remove sometimes?



A tampon can be a little harder to remove if it's not lubricated enough. This sometimes happens at the beginning and end of your cycle when you aren't bleeding as heavily. Try switching to a lighter absorbency tampon and not changing them TOO often (but never leave them in for longer than 8 hours).

My tampon is stuck. What must I do?



Don't panic – it's going to be okay. It's important to remember your tampon can't get lost in your vagina even if you can't feel the string. Take a deep breath and give this a try: Start by washing your hands with warm water and soap. Then lie down, sit on a toilet or stand with one leg on the seat of the toilet (whichever is comfortable for you).

Try to relax your muscles and carefully insert one finger into your vagina. Slowly move your finger in a circular motion to feel for any sign of the tampon. If you find it, use two fingers to carefully pull it out. Once it's out, check the tampon to make sure it's still in one piece and that it's all out.

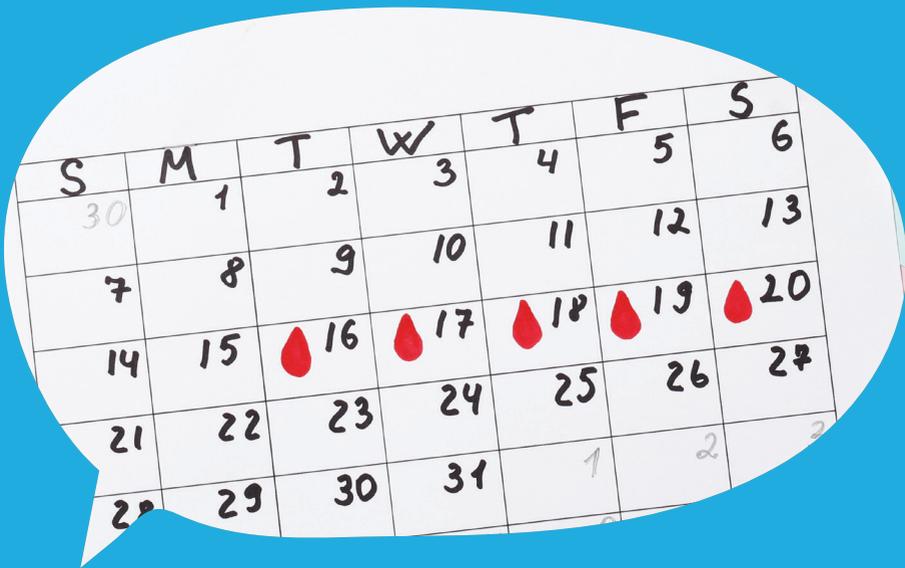
If you haven't been able to find the tampon, we recommend you see a doctor. If you have any symptoms of an infection like an odour, discharge with an unpleasant smell, a high fever, rash or redness on your genitals, itching inside your vulva or abdominal pain, see a doctor immediately.

Just started using tampons for the first time ever and I don't know how to figure out which size I should use. I bought regular ones because I figured that's a safe place to start. Should I just stick with regular and change it often or as needed as my flow gets lighter or should I buy all the sizes?

Vicki

Using a regular absorbency for your first tampon trial is a great idea, even if you already have an idea of your flow from previous periods. At first, you may want to use a liner with your tampon for extra protection until you understand your absorbency requirements. Tampons can be worn for up to 8 hours, with most people removing every 3-5 hours. If, however, you find there is any resistance when trying to remove, leave it in a little longer (never longer than 8 hours though). Finally, it can take a while to figure out the right absorbency for you, if you are removing a regular tampon after 2 hours or less, then switch up to super, coming back down to regular on your lighter days.





Irregular Periods

Irregular periods are common, but that doesn't mean they're normal. There are many reasons why someone might have an irregular cycle, some of them requiring medical attention. Whether someone's period arrives unexpectedly or ghosts them completely, this is a space to unpack how, why and what to do.

Is it normal to have my period twice in one month?

Vicki

If your menstrual cycle is short in length, around 21-25 days then there may be times when you get two periods in one month. Start making a note of the first day of your period and continue counting until the day before your next period, do this every month for a guide to your monthly cycle.

Why do I have cramps but no period?

Megan

There are all sorts of reasons why your period might be a little late, and honestly, with everything going on right now in the world, stress could be the most likely culprit. If this is very unusual for you, I'd keep an eye on it, and see how next month's period goes. Fluctuating hormone levels can do all sorts of things and delaying our periods is one of them! Just remember that if you have had unprotected intercourse recently, it might be an idea to take a pregnancy test, just in case. If your period is often late, you might have irregular periods.

Some things that contribute to irregular periods are:

- Hormones (if you've recently started your period, are close to menopause or have recently begun or changed hormonal contraception)
- Being ill (anything from flu to a stomach bug)
- Some kinds of medications
- Poor diet (not getting enough nutrients)
- Over exercising
- Drastic weight change (gain or loss)
- Conditions like PCOS (polycystic ovary syndrome).

Is it normal to skip two months of your period?

Megan

While it isn't 'normal' per se, there are many things that could cause you to skip your period. For starters, stress is one of the major factors that can disrupt menstrual cycles. Other reasons are hormonal: changing medications, recently weaning your baby, switching to a new hormonal contraception. Over exercising and weight loss / gain can also disrupt your cycle, as can recent illness.

Pregnancy is of course another factor, so if you have had unprotected sex and haven't taken a test, it might be an idea to do so, just to make sure. But if that's not a possibility, just keep an eye on this and if you skip your period for a third month, it might be an idea to see your doctor, for your peace of mind.

My periods are usually regular, but now I am on day 32 and still haven't started. Honestly, though, my entire life is completely on its head mostly thanks to COVID-19 and to moving across the country shortly before lockdown and I am feeling really lonely and stressed. Could this be why I am so late?

Candice

Stress can definitely be a factor in causing late periods especially since you've moved across the country and you are feeling lonely and stressed, this causes a rise in cortisol which essentially thins your endometrium lining. When I feel stressed, I spend time doing destressing activities - I recently got a coloring book and it has been very helpful for calming me down. I also find using guided meditation apps help a great deal! Just take the time to treat yourself and to relax. If it doesn't normalise and it's stressing you out even more, have a check up with your doctor for peace of mind.





Myth Busting

When tackling period myths remember to be respectful of different beliefs that may be influenced by a member's lived experience, history or culture. While we want users to feel empowered with the facts, we don't wish to do so at the cost of anybody's dignity. Here are some examples of how to handle these conversations:

In my culture when a girl comes of age they are given raw eggs to drink... it was disgusting but apparently “essential” to prevent “smelly blood”. Anyone else have any rituals or superstitions surrounding your first period? Or was it just poor me who had to do the whole egg thing?

Candice

Such an interesting thing to go through. I personally didn't have to go through any “rite of passage” but I was told through friends that throwing away your pad incorrectly means that ghosts will follow you for the rest of your life.

I know in Ghana, when a menstruator has their first period, they are expected to eat a boiled egg without biting it. Biting the egg is considered to be killing the future babies.

Some cultures have a party thrown to celebrate your transition into womanhood where you don't leave the house for three days, then get presents and a huge party. You mustn't be around children or men during your first period.

Whereas in other cultures, menstruators are expected to cleanse themselves in a lake to be clean. So it varies from culture to culture.

I visited a church and the pastor said if you are on your period you are dirty and impure, and that the minute you step into church you automatically make the whole church dirty. Is this true?

Megan

I can imagine that this must be very difficult to hear, especially when you're in church to receive guidance and comfort from a spiritual leader. Every denomination / congregation holds its own set of beliefs about our human bodies and it can be distressing for menstruators to hear that our natural bodily functions are somehow impure. Thinking of you.

Is it okay to swim while on your periods?

Vicki

Swimming is great exercise at any time of the month and for some can really ease menstrual cramps. But you do need to use period protection if you are menstruating and want to swim, this is when tampons can be an ideal choice. Worn internally they capture fluid from inside the body and prevent any leaks occurring. I would recommend you try with a mini or regular tampon next time you want to swim and are on your period.

Candice

Go for it - there's no reason to stop just because it's that time of the month. And swimming can help with your period cramps. HelloClue shares that during exercise, "your body releases endorphins which act as natural painkillers and give you an increased feeling of well-being". So swim away!

Is it true that if I eat eggs while I am on my period, I am gonna get a heavy flow?

Megan

While certain foods may exacerbate cramping and sluggishness, there is no proven link between consuming eggs and heavier periods (unless of course you have a food sensitivity / allergy to eggs, which may then intensify your usual allergic symptoms like headaches and eczema).

Further reading

- [5 Common Period Myths in South](#)



Contraception

Hormonal contraception can have an effect on one's menstrual cycle. Some contraceptive methods may alter the length of a period, cause it to be heavier or lighter, or cause it to cease completely.

Why does the blood smell like iron and this month I have been bleeding so much that I had to change tampons every hour or I'll leak. Could it be my copper loop contraceptive?

Candice

How long have you had the copper IUD for? I am currently on my copper IUD, almost been on it for 2 years and the bleeding normalised after a year. I think it's a good idea to get it checked out. While heavier periods are a possible side-effect of the copper IUD, you shouldn't be bleeding **this** much. As for the coppery smell, menstrual fluid does contain iron, which may be the reason for what you're noticing.

Megan

I have had the copper IUD before and it did give me quite heavy, prolonged periods that were very painful. This isn't everybody's experience and it turns out that my body was rejecting the IUD, which is why I had a less pleasant experience on it. How long have you had it in for? It may be contributing to your heavy flow, especially if your periods are heavier now than they were before you had it inserted. Make sure that you're using the highest absorbency tampon possible, and pair it with a pantyliner (or pad if this isn't enough) for extra peace of mind.

If you find that this isn't absorbent enough for your flow, and your period is becoming a distressing or stressful time of the month for you, it may be an idea to chat to your doctor, just to see if there are any underlying reasons that may be causing your heavy flow. As for period blood having a slightly metallic smell, this is quite normal and is caused by the presence of iron in your blood. However, if the smell is stronger than usual or becoming much more noticeable, it may be an idea to bring this up with your doctor. Keep us posted, please.

Can the morning-after pill (emergency contraception) affect my menstrual cycle?

Binave

Yeah this has happened to me before and I panicked but the doctor said it was what was supposed to happen.

Megan

The morning-after pill can disrupt your menstrual cycle a little, since it's (necessarily) a stronger dose of hormones than your normal contraceptive pill. So, breakthrough bleeding and spotting isn't uncommon in the weeks after taking the morning-after pill. It may also have been the reason why your period was lighter and shorter than normal.

The morning-after pill is an effective emergency contraception and if you took it within the prescribed amount of time after having unprotected sex (it is suggested that you take it at least within 72 hours of having sex although it can be effective for up to five days afterwards) there is a good chance that it did work. What I would do is just take a pregnancy test (for your own peace of mind) and then again in about a week's time, just to make sure that the morning-after pill was effective.

If you are on the Pill and miss a day/pill, is it normal to spot and how long should the spotting last for?

Candice

In my experience of using the pill, it is normal to have some spotting when you miss a pill. Spotting (breakthrough bleeding) does not mean there is something wrong with you or that the pill is too strong or weak for you, it just means your body is reacting to the hormone levels. Set a reminder if you need to, but try to take the pill around the same time each morning / evening, which helps its efficacy.

Due to health reasons I have had to stop using my contraceptive injection after 6 plus years. Has anyone else been through something similar that can tell me what kind of "first period" I can expect? And how long did it take for your period to come back and then go back to a normal cycle?

Candice

If you are using Depo-Provera, then it may take 6 months to a year for the side effects to end and your period to return to normal. You'll most likely experience breakthrough bleeding and spotting during this time.

I have had the mirena IUD for the past four years and since then I haven't had my period. I just have period cramps and cravings every month around the time I would get my period. Is this normal?

Vicki

The Mirena IUD often suspends your period, it does not mean there is an issue. The levonorgestrel in Mirena reduces the monthly thickening of the lining of your uterus, less thickening means less menstrual flow and over time it may cease altogether. If the cramps are bearable then there really is no need to worry, and keeping active may help alleviate any discomfort.... however if the pain is difficult to manage then have a chat to your gynaecologist.

How does the pill affect your menstrual cycle?

Vicki

Just as we are all unique individuals, so will our periods be too.

Contraception methods such as the pill or depo injection can change the menstrual cycle, for some it will be heavier, others lighter or cease completely. It is also true that it takes the body a few months to get used to contraception of this kind and so you may find your cycle and flow are a little different each month as the body grows accustomed and balances out the new hormone levels.

Megan

This really depends on what kind of pill you're on :) While the pill acts on the entire menstrual cycle, often we're most interested in what it does to our periods (or withdrawal bleeds, if we're going to be accurate) :)

With combination pills, which contain both oestrogen and progestin, you're not going to ovulate and will experience a withdrawal bleed when taking the inactive pills, which is usually around three to five days. These pills more or less mimic your usual menstrual cycle, and may very well regulate it more and shorten and lighten your bleeding.

There are different kinds of combination pills and depending on which one you're on, you may experience a monthly bleed or a period only three or four times during the year. A progestin only pill, which is also called the mini-pill, thins the endometrium so no ovum can be implanted there and may also prevent ovulation; it contains no inactive pills which means you might not experience any withdrawal bleeding.

Contraception Glossary

Copper Intrauterine Device (IUD)

A long-term contraceptive device that is inserted into the uterus, usually in a very quick procedure. A plastic, T-shaped device with copper wire wrapped around it, the IUD is one of the most reliable and effective forms of contraception.

Mirena

Just like the copper IUD, the Mirena is also a long-term contraceptive device which is T-shaped and inserted into the uterus. However, the Mirena does not feature any copper and instead, releases small amounts of the hormone levonorgestrel into your uterus.

The Pill

A hormonal contraceptive that is taken everyday, preferably at the same time, in the form of a pill. There are many different kinds of hormonal contraceptive pills, but the majority contain both progesterone and oestrogen, which work to make the uterus inhospitable to a fertilised egg, prevent ovulation and stopping fertilisation from occurring.

The Injection / Shot

The injection is administered by a healthcare professional every three months. Containing the long-acting form of the hormone progestin, the injection is a reliable form of contraception.

A large, light pink speech bubble is centered on a dark pink background. Inside the bubble, the word "PERIOD" is spelled out using seven wooden blocks. The first block, containing the letter 'P', is dark brown, while the other six blocks (E, R, I, O, D) are light pink. The blocks are arranged in a horizontal line.

PERIOD

Puberty

We have seen a lot of parents (and even older siblings) asking questions to help their children (or siblings) navigate their first periods, heavy periods and even irregular bleeding. If you don't know how to help the parent, it might be because you don't have enough information, such as the age of their child, or a full list of symptoms that they're experiencing. Don't hesitate to ask questions if need be.

My daughter has just started her period and I would like her to try tampons as she loves to dance and swim. Do you have any advice on how to educate her to insert one?

Kath

I think the most important thing when it comes to trying tampons is to reassure her that it's totally normal not to get it right the first time! I think too many girls think if they don't get it right the first time, they never will - which is totally not the case!

Depending on how comfortable she is talking to you about it, definitely have a chat to help demystify the mechanics of how things work down there. It's also a good idea to give her choices to find what works for her - so get her both applicator and non-applicator tampons in the lowest absorbency to try. My mom even gave me a water-based lubricant with my first box of applicator tampons 'just in case' I was struggling (I was, and it helped a lot!)

My daughter is nearing puberty and I'd like to put together a kit of some sort for when it happens. What should I put in it?

Lil-Lets

This is such a good question and it's wonderful that you want to make sure your daughter is prepared. Giving her a kit to keep in her school bag and one at home can help her feel confident that she's 'got this' when the time comes.

Here's what we'd recommend putting into a first-period care pack:

- Lil-Lets Mini, Regular and Super Pads and Tampons (let her choose what works for her as she gets to understand her flow and absorbency needs)
- Lil-Lets Feminine Wipes
- A spare pair of panties

It's also a good idea to give her some pantyliners and explain how she can use them if she starts to notice more discharge before her first period. Wearing a pantyliner can also help her feel more confident if she's worried about her period starting unexpectedly. Once she starts her period, try to help her understand her flow (and how it can change during her period) and explain that if she's needing to change a sanitary product more frequently than every 4-8 hours, that she may need to change to a higher absorbency.

How do you tell your daughter who has not yet started her period to be ready?

Candice

Ask your child how much they know about menstruation, and whether their friends have already started their periods. Encourage openness by letting your daughter finish what she's saying about periods, even if you want to jump right in and correct her on the spot.

Assure your daughter that periods are a normal, natural bodily function and a sign that her body will be developing as it should be. Tell her that it's natural to feel a little apprehensive about all of this change, but that it is manageable, and is something that billions of menstruators have experienced for centuries.

It's important that you give your daughter the biological facts - you can start by explaining the role of the uterus and ovaries and then progress to menstruation itself. Here is a link to the Puberty section on the Lil-Lets website, which contains plenty of information for both you and your child.

<https://www.lil-lets.com/za/en/puberty/>

How do I get my daughter to transition from pads to tampons? She's very active and I know that the tampons will be more beneficial.

Kath

Moms like you are the best moms ;) My mom recommended tampons to me from day one, but I was too nervous to try and too awkward to ask questions. But my mom gave me everything I needed to figure it out in my own time. I would recommend that you get her both the Lil-Lets Mini Applicator and Non-applicator Tampons for her (it's always best to start on the lowest absorbency until she gets more confident) along with some pantyliners to use as back-up. Start by explaining the benefits of using tampons, and also reassure her that sometimes you have to try quite a few times to get it right (too many try once and give up).

She might find it easiest to use an applicator at first, but it's good to give her the option of non-applicator tampons too so she can choose what works for her. It might also help to share a link to a video on how to insert a tampon if she feels awkward talking to you about it and would rather learn by herself.

Further reading

- **First periods**
- **Emotional upheaval during puberty**
- **Refresher guide to puberty for parents**



lil-lets talk
...

*Conversations for
people with periods*

