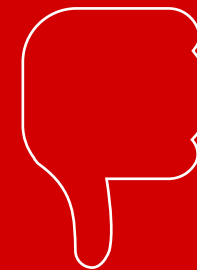
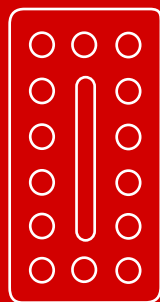
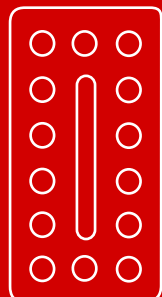
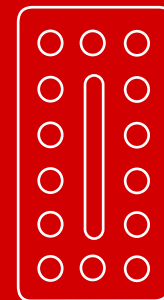
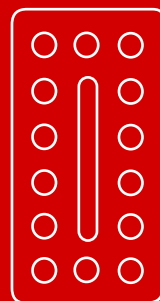


MENSTRU

PEDIA

Agnieszka
Doczyńska



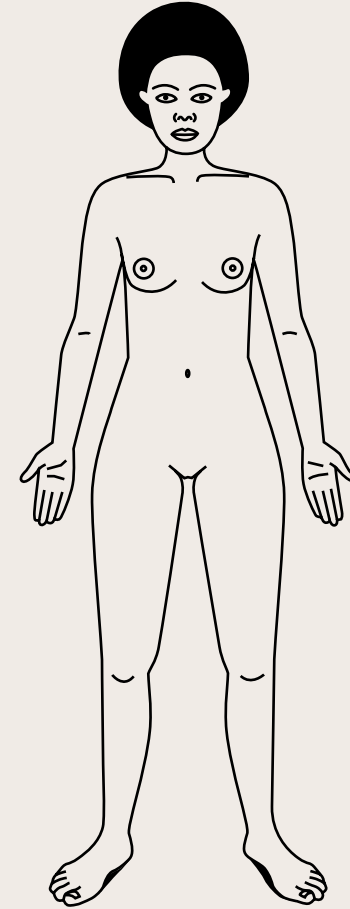
Menstruation is taboo in numerous cultures and countries. Access to knowledge on this topic is limited. Therefore, many people around the world suffer from stigma, as well as wrong usage of products and fear of asking. This complex topic, which is a daily matter for a big part of the population, still remains a shameful one. Together with Sejal we came up with the idea of creating a menstrual pictorial guide, that would explain not only the basic concepts but also the complicated ones about menstruation without using words. Feel free to use and share this guide and contribute to the fight against period taboos.

Agnieszka Doczyńska

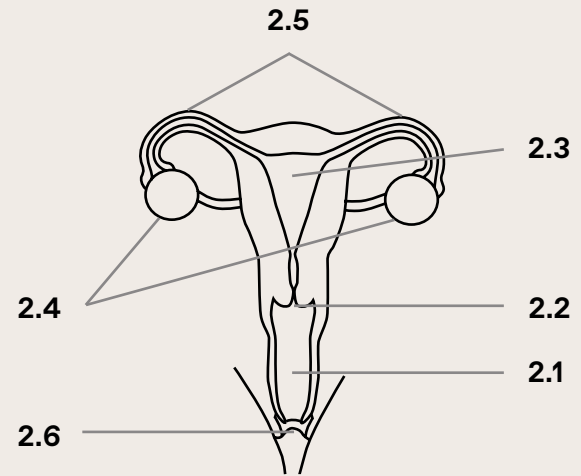
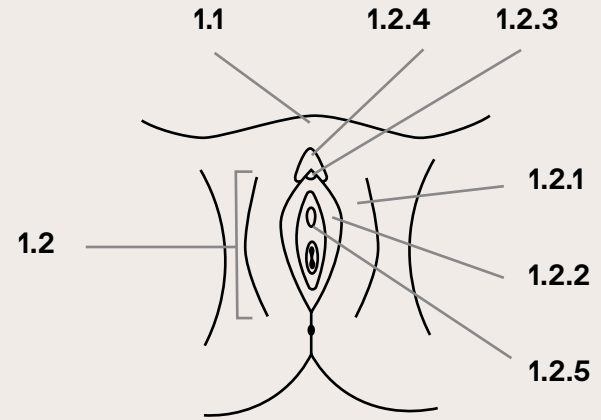
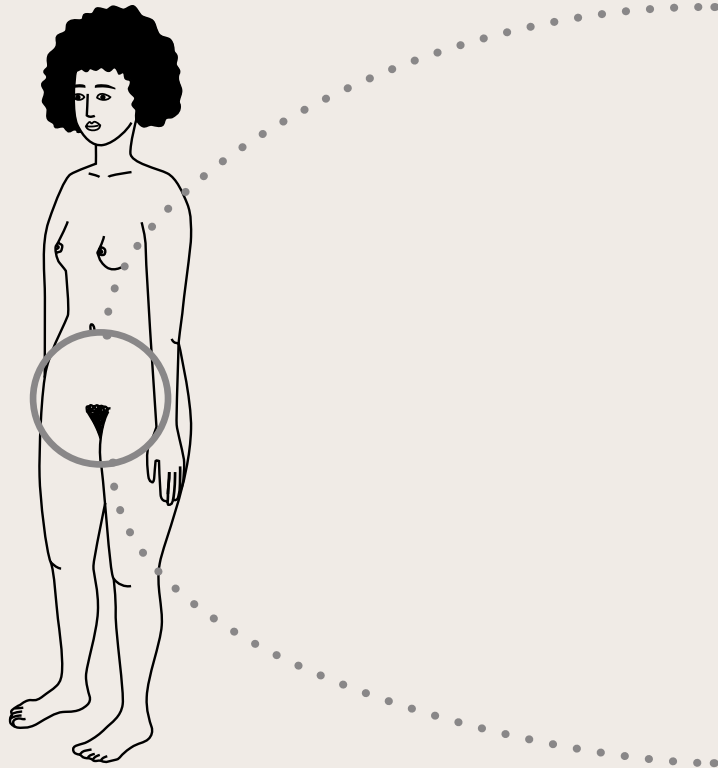


ANATOMY

4 Female Reproductive System

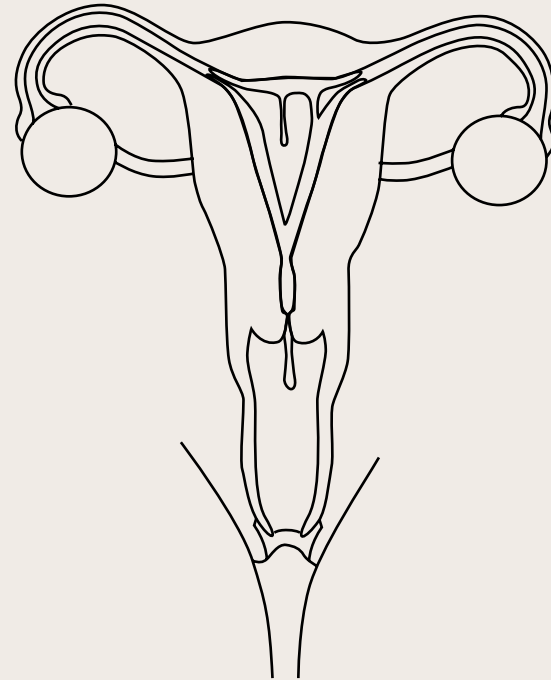


Female Reproductive System

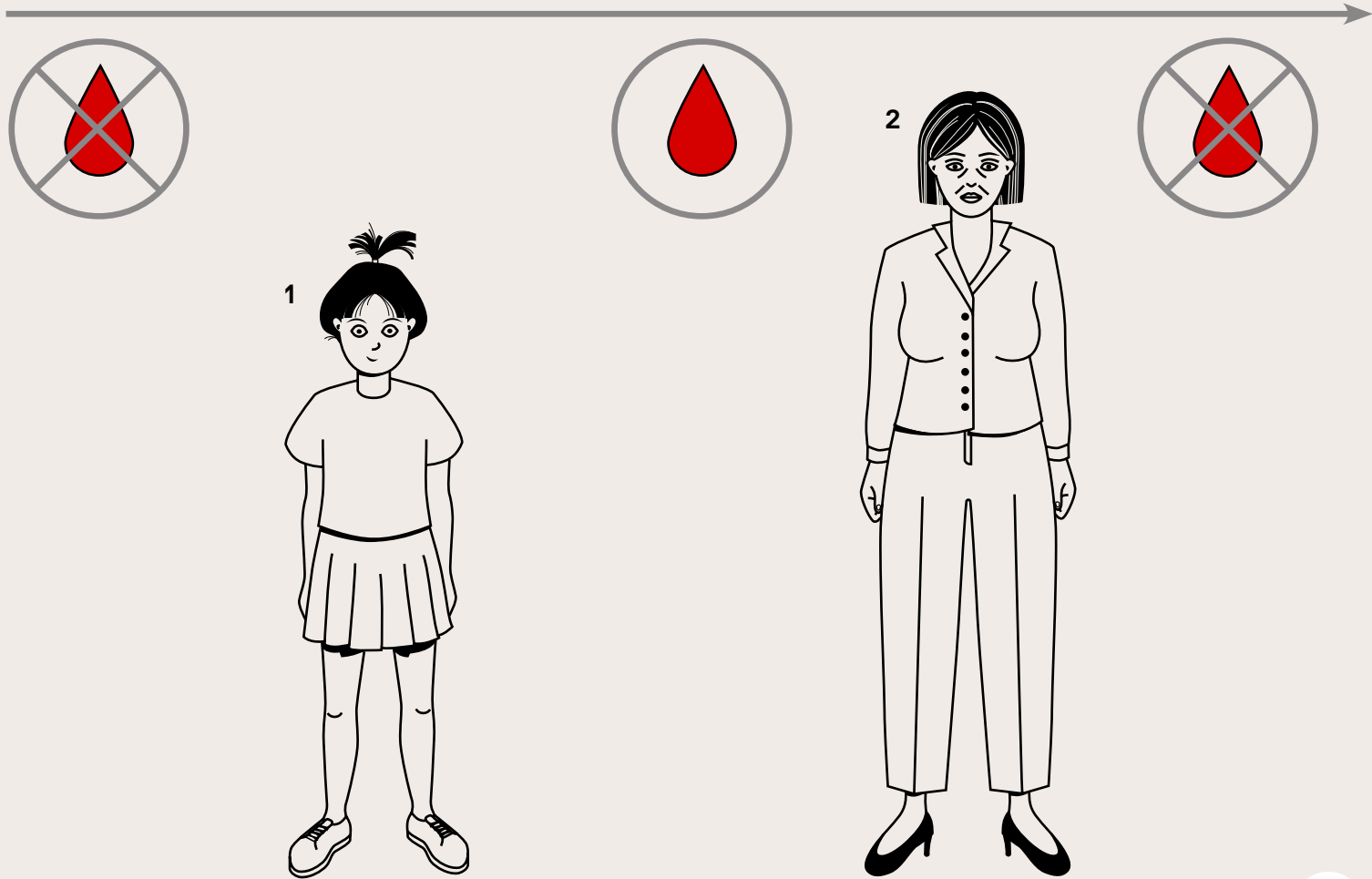


PERIOD PROCESS

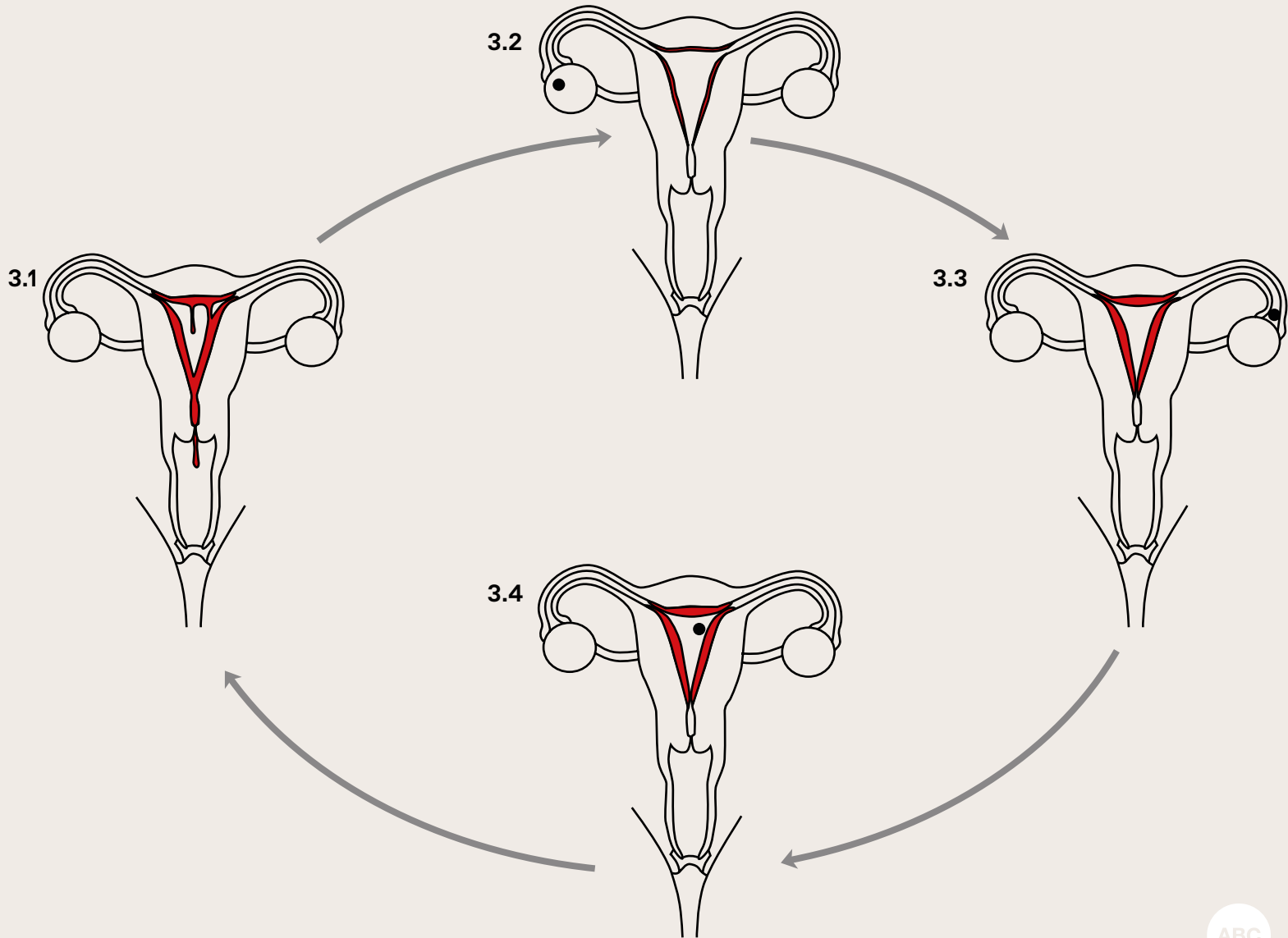
- 6 Menstruation
- 8 Normal Period Symptoms
- 9 Alarming Period Symptoms
- 10 Menstrual Blood and Vaginal Discharge
- 11 Premenstrual Syndrome
- 12 PMS Symptoms



Menstruation



Navigation icons: a person icon, a magnifying glass, a blood drop, a first aid kit, a graduation cap, a building, a water drop, a thumbs up, and the letters 'ABC'.



Navigation icons: a person icon, a magnifying glass, a water drop, a plus sign, a syringe, a grid, a wave, a thumbs up, and the letters ABC.

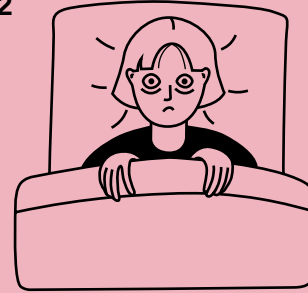


Normal Period Symptoms

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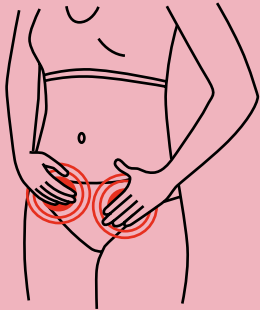
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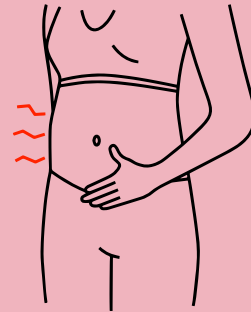
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4.4



4.5



4.6



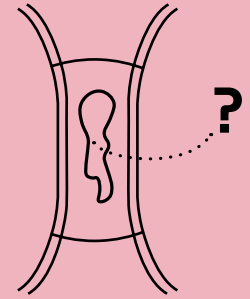
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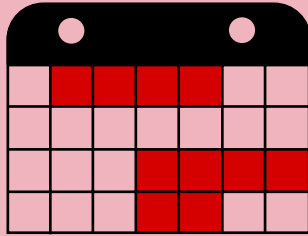


Alarming Period Symptoms

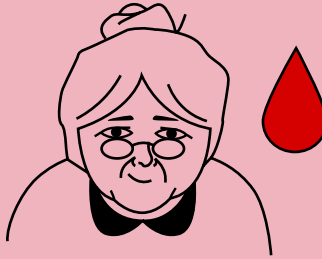
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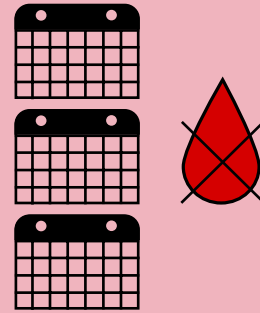
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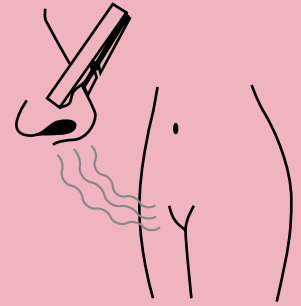
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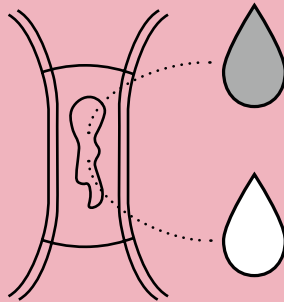
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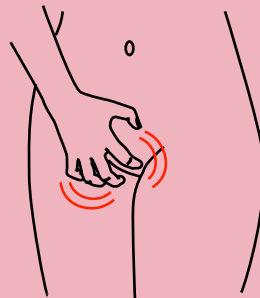
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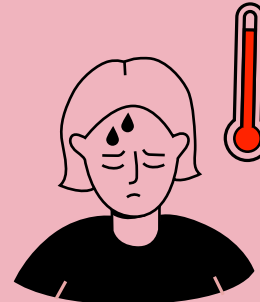
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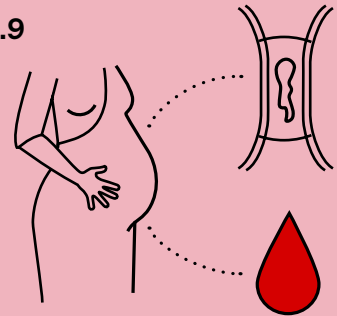
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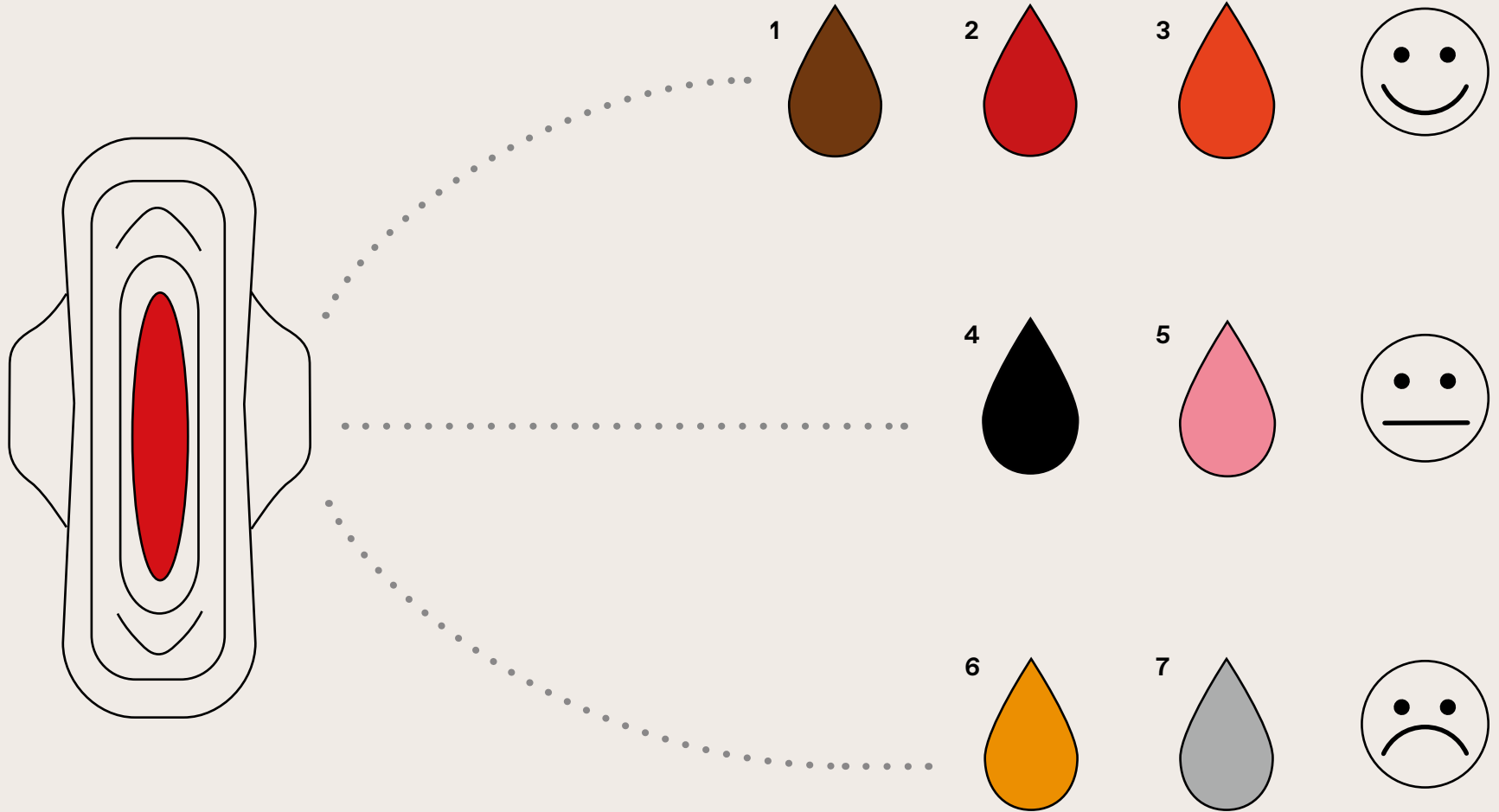
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Navigation icons on the left side of the page:

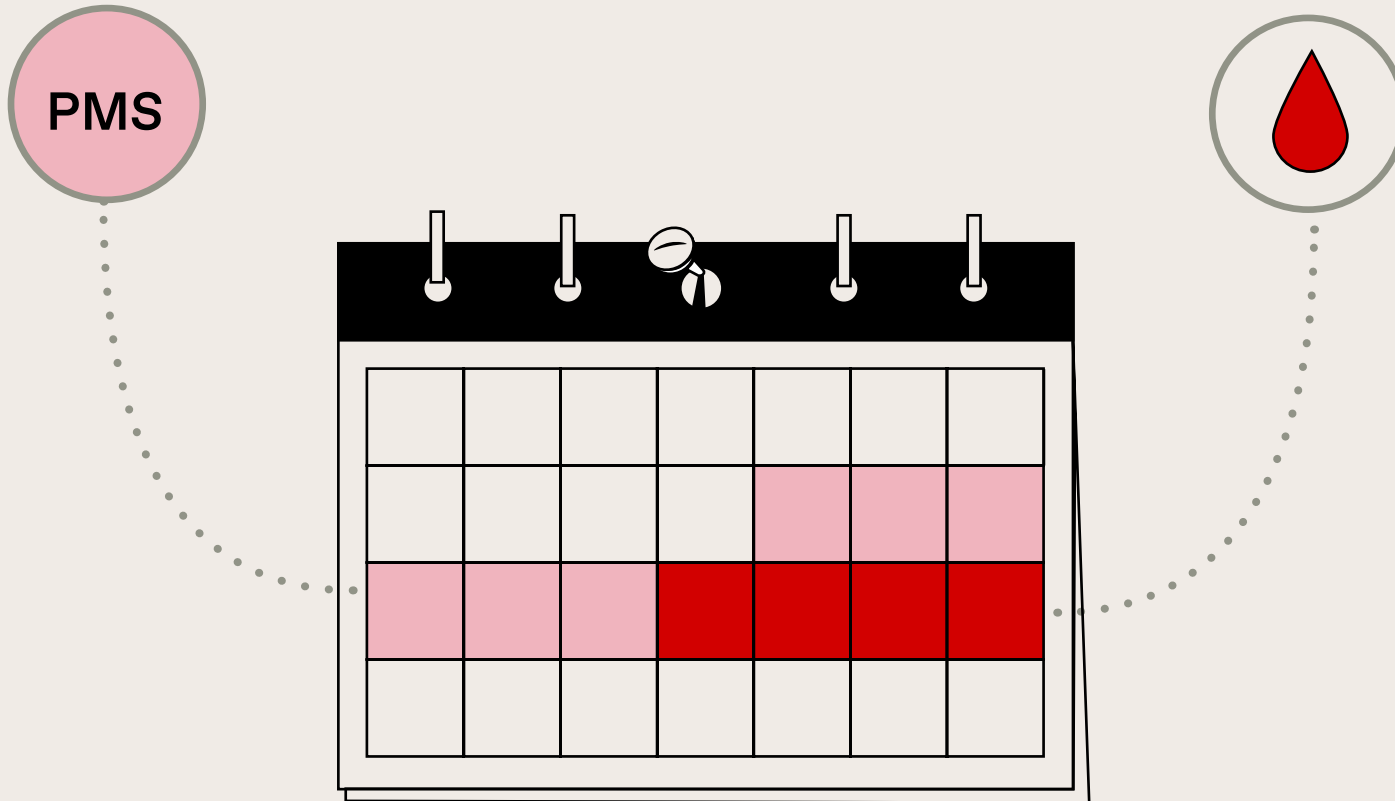
- Person icon
- Search icon
- Water drop icon
- Medical icons: first aid kit, syringe, and pills
- Calendar icon
- Waves icon
- Thumbs up icon
- ABC text

Menstrual Blood and Vaginal Discharge



Navigation icons: a person icon, a magnifying glass, a medical cross, a keyboard, a water drop, a thumbs up, and the text 'ABC'.

Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)



PMS Symptoms

1



2



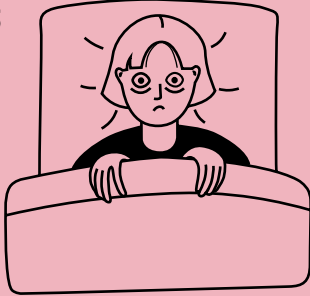
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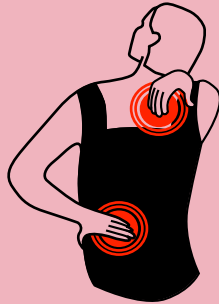
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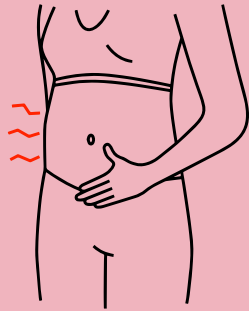
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8



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10



11



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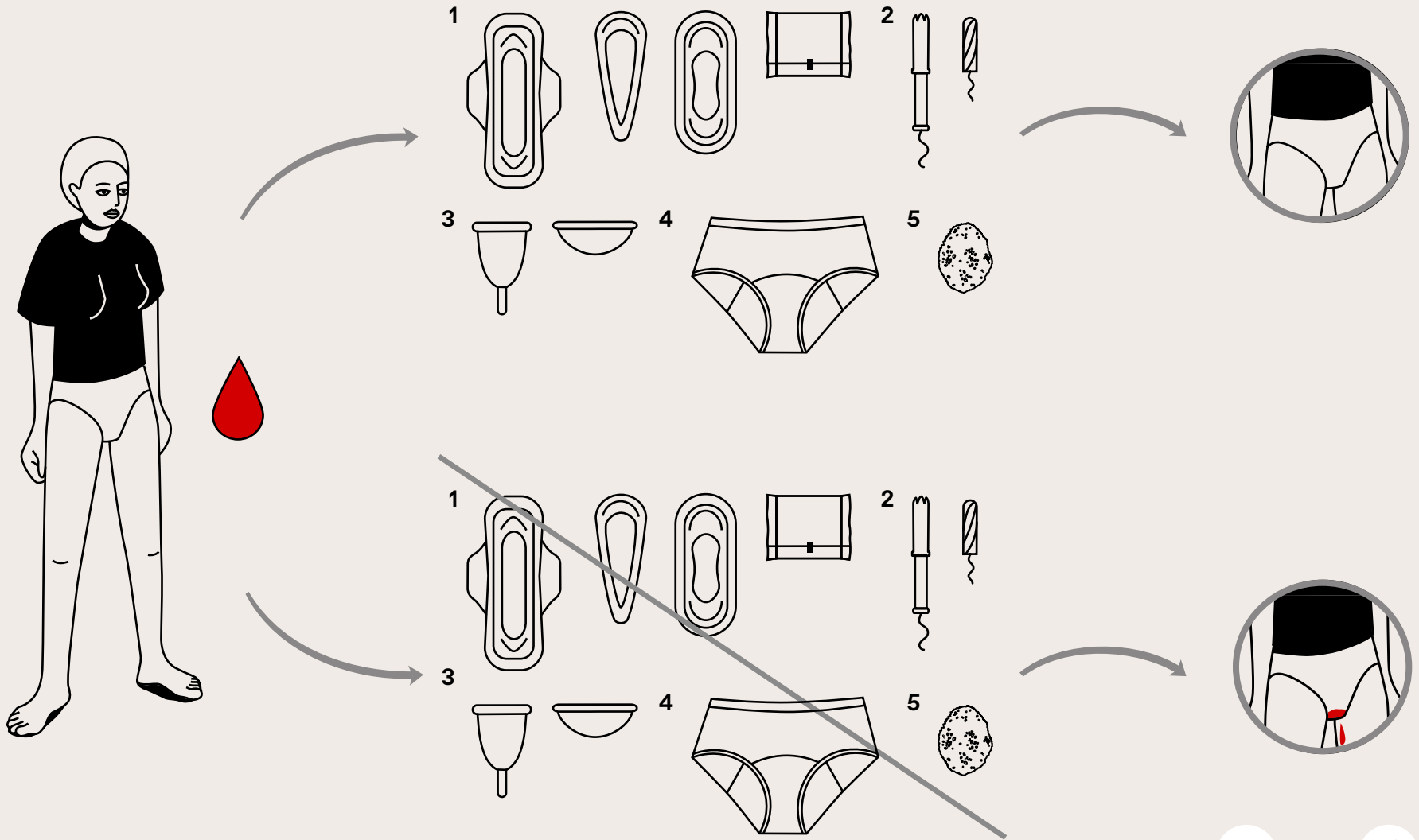


SANITARY PRODUCTS

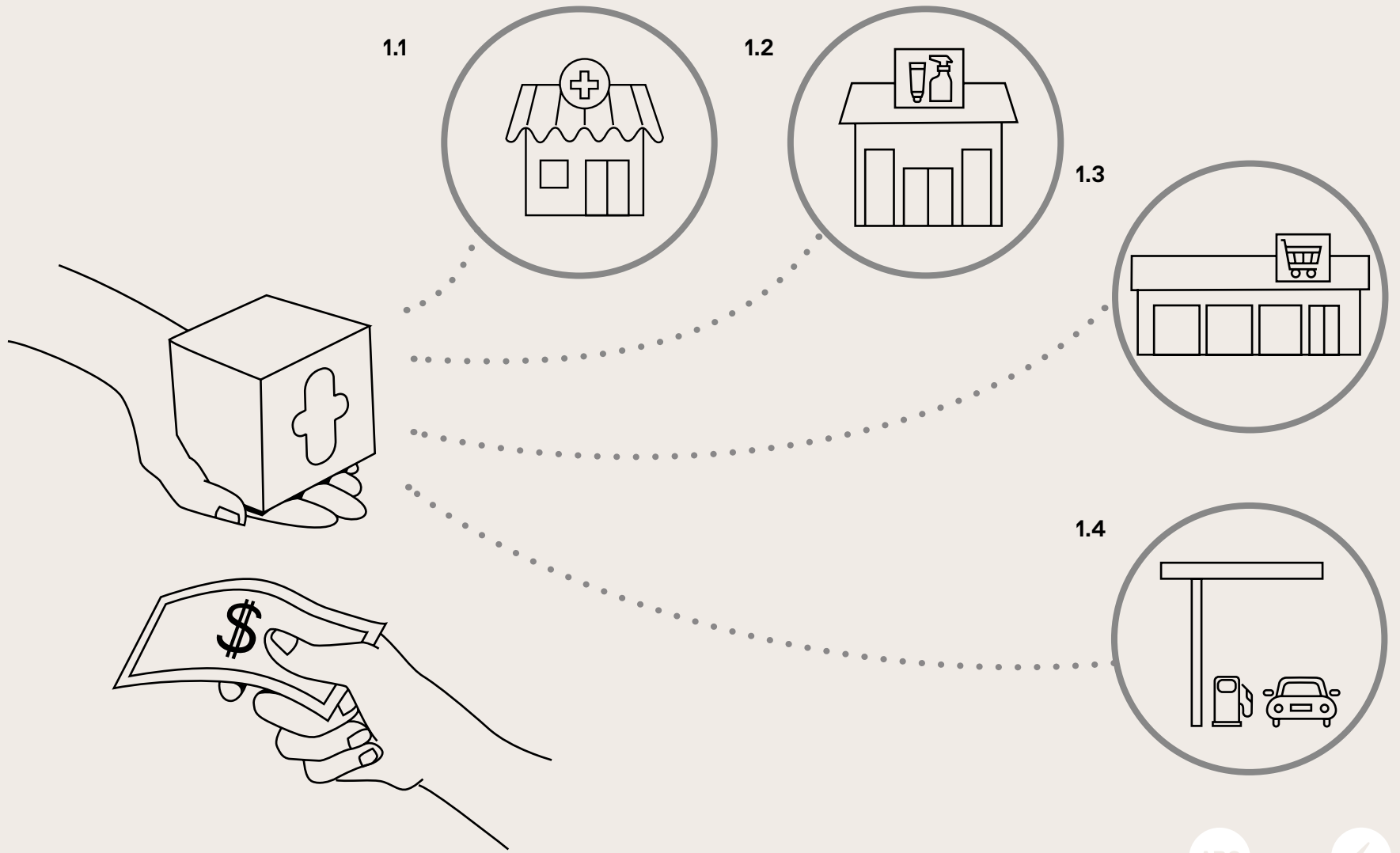
- 14 What are Sanitary Products?
- 15 Buying Sanitary Products
- 17 Toxic Shock Syndrome
- 18 mTSS Symptoms
- 19 How to Use a Sanitary Pad?
- 21 How to Use a Tampon?
- 24 How to Use a Menstrual Cup?
- 26 How to Use a Menstrual Sponge?
- 27 How to Use Period Underwear?



What are Sanitary Products?

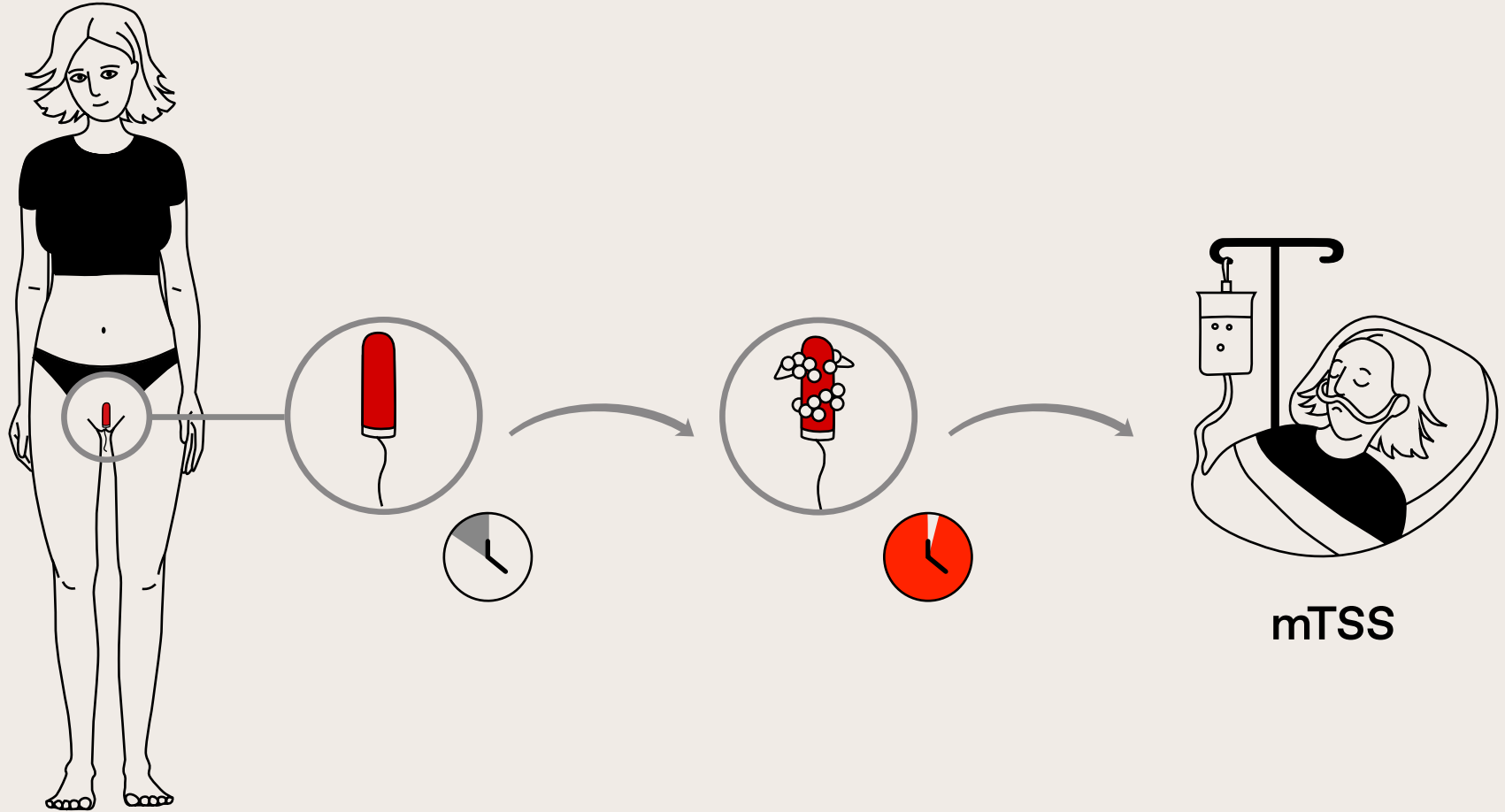


Buying Sanitary Products



A vertical sidebar on the left side of the page containing several icons: a person, a magnifying glass, a water drop, a fork and knife, a building, a water tap, a thumbs up, and the letters 'ABC'.

Toxic Shock Syndrome (mTSS)



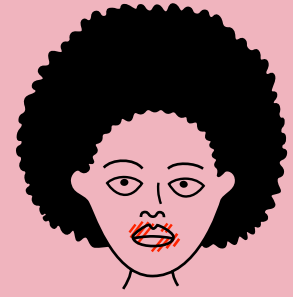


mTSS Symptoms

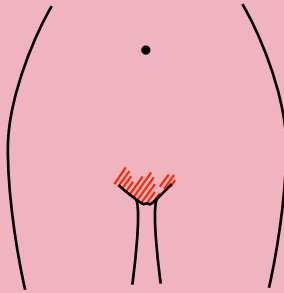
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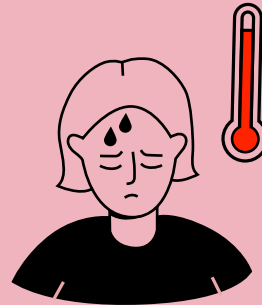
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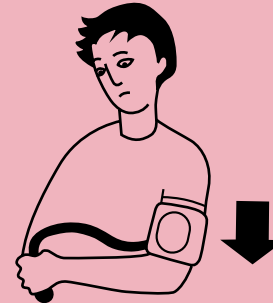
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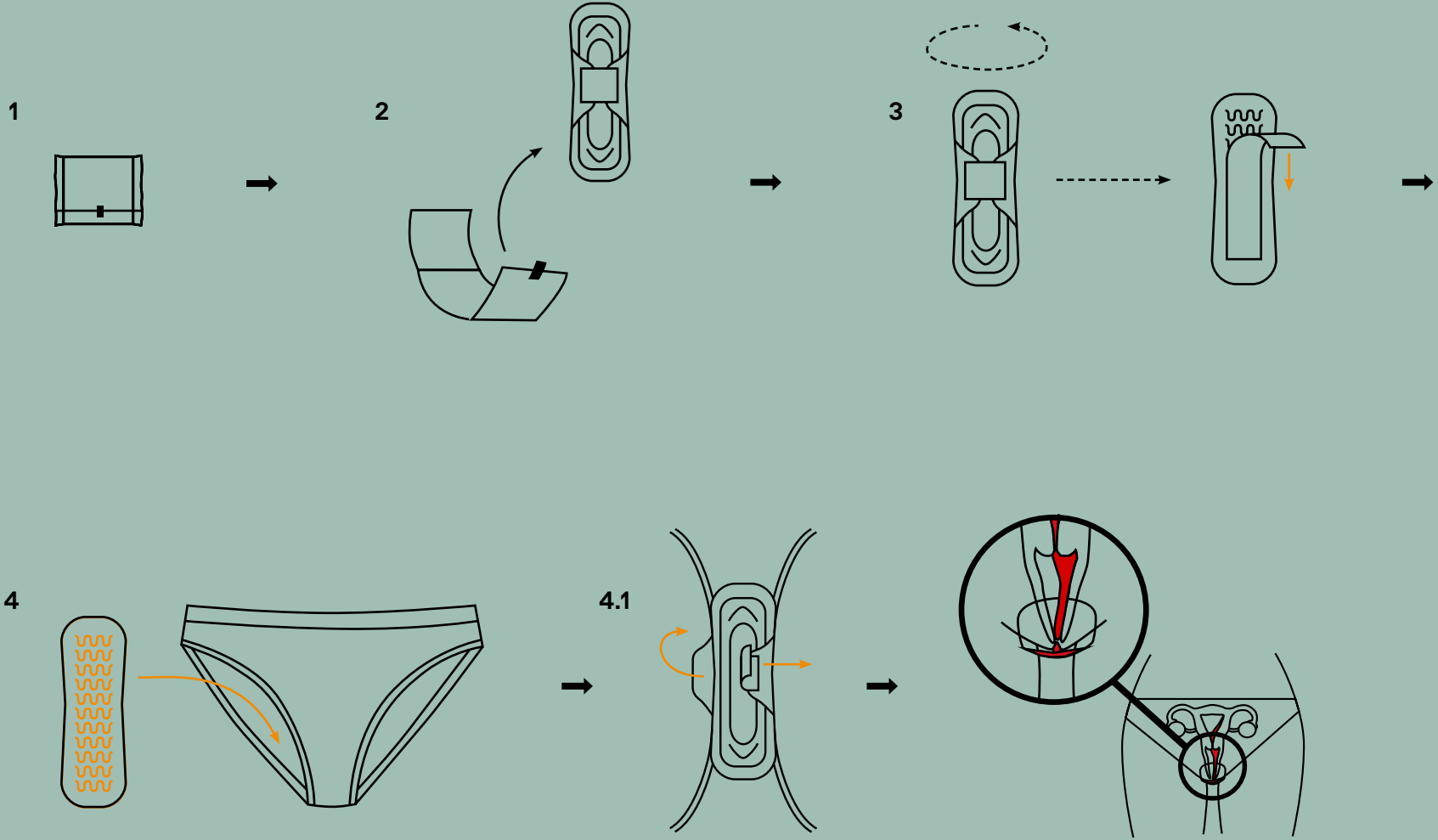


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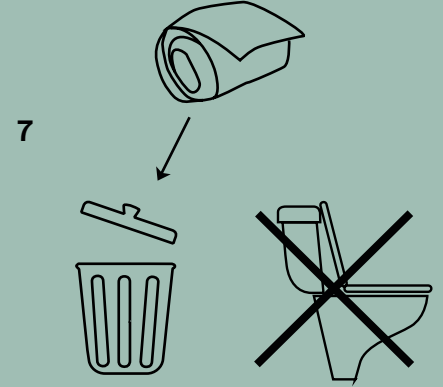
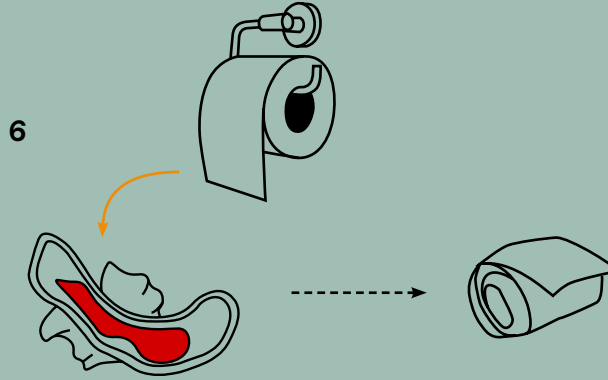
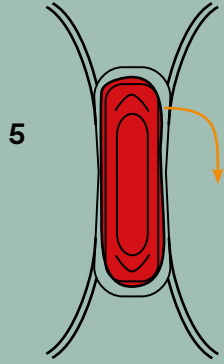


How to Use a Sanitary Pad?





How to Use a Sanitary Pad?



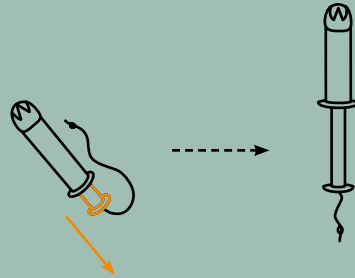


How to Use a Tampon (With an Applicator)?

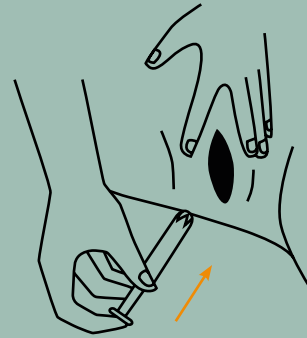
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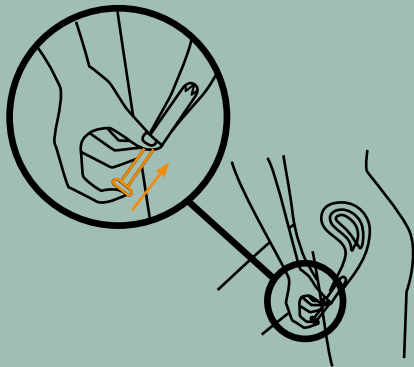
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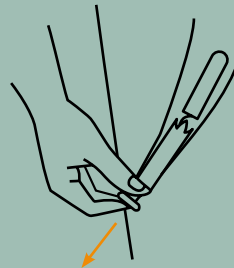
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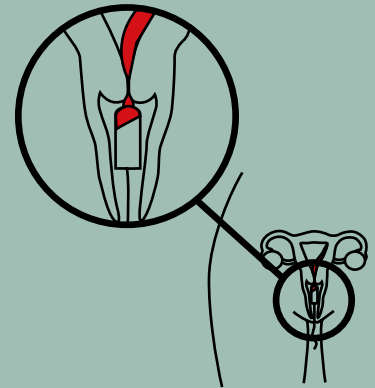
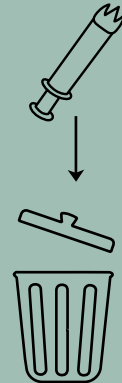
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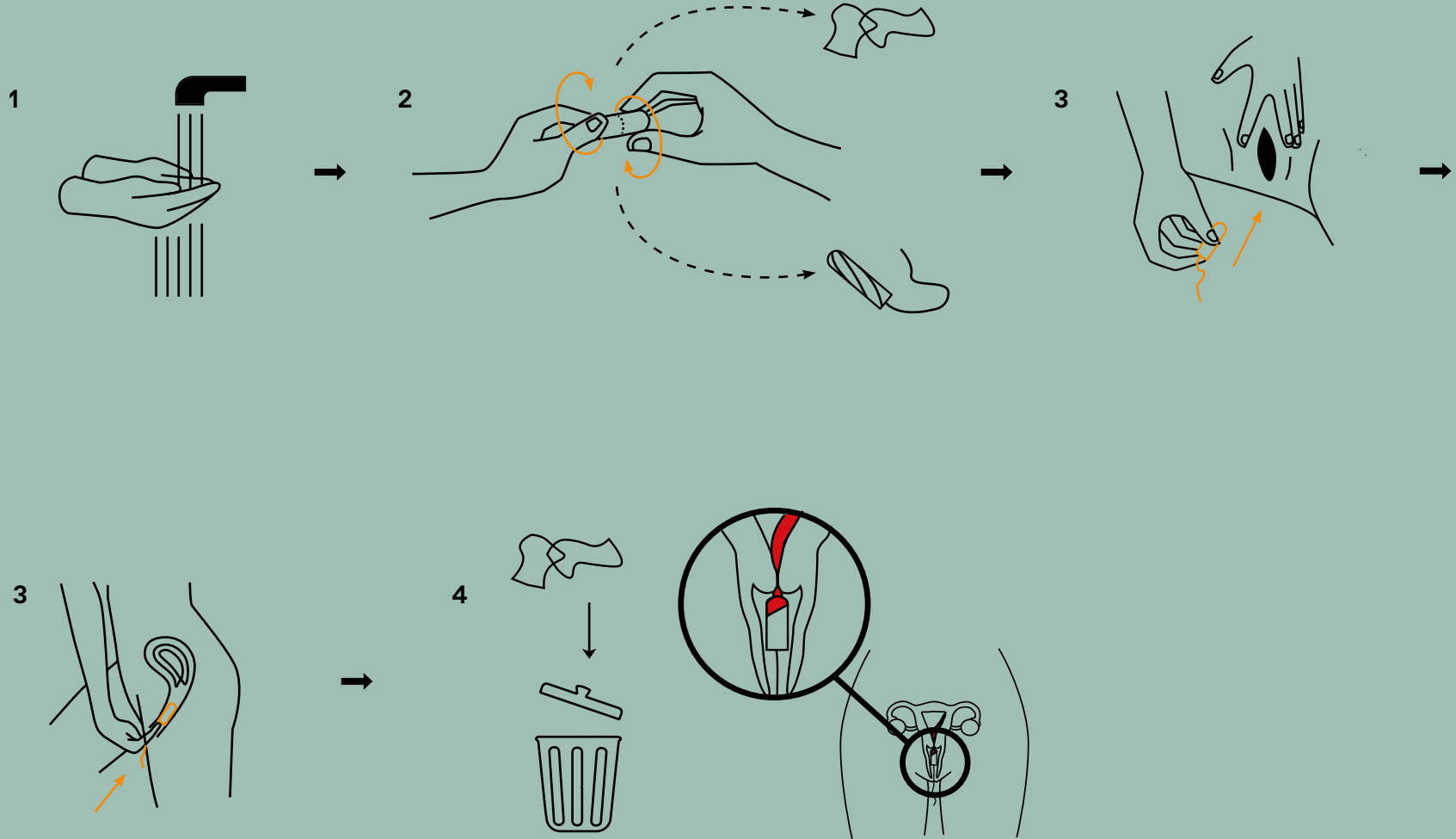


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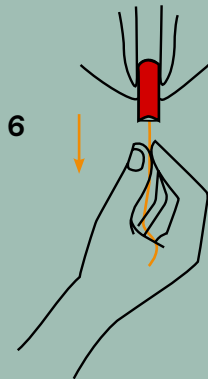
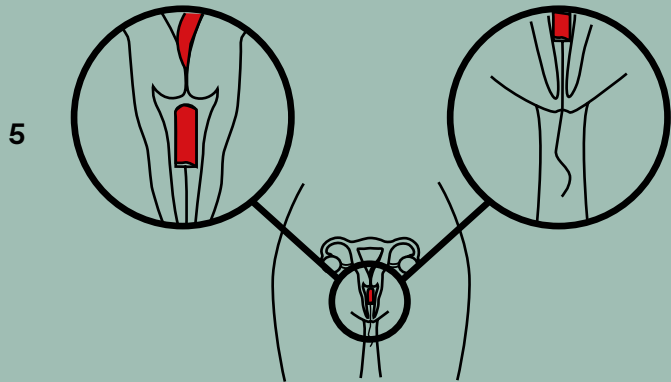


How to Use a Tampon (Without an Applicator)?



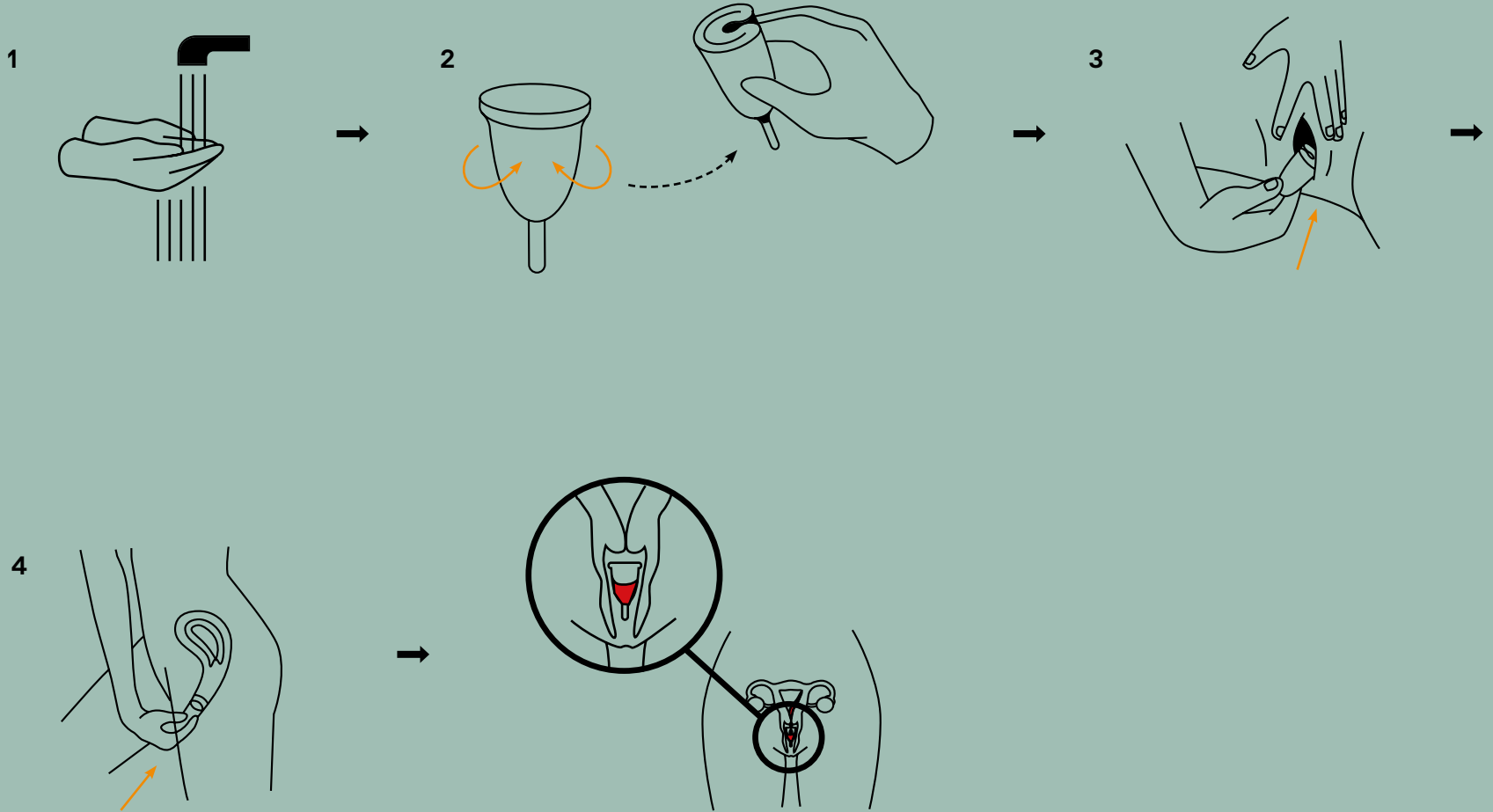


How to Use a Tampon?





How to Use a Menstrual Cup?



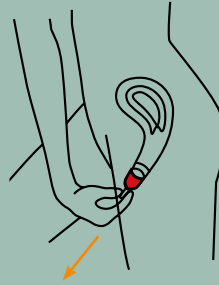


How to Use a Menstrual Cup?

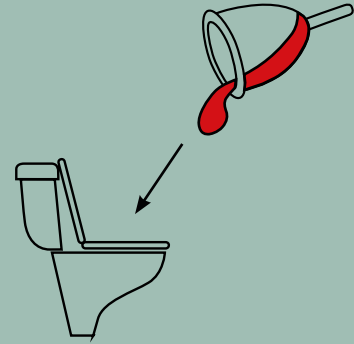
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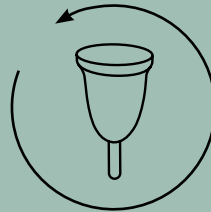
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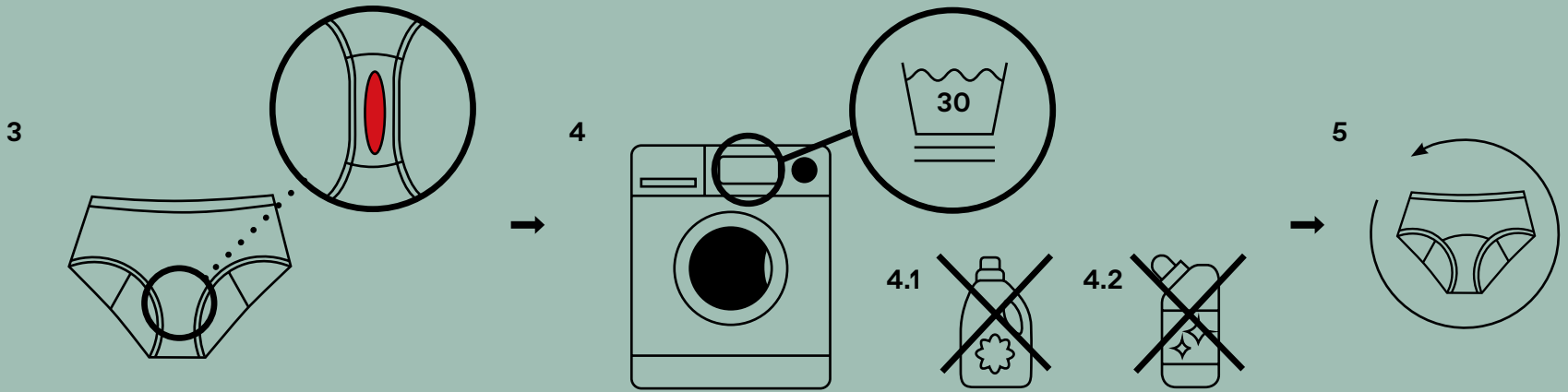
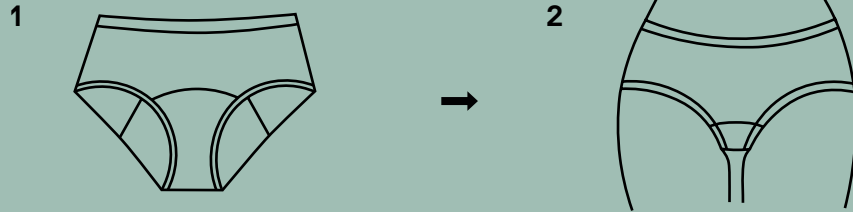


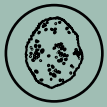
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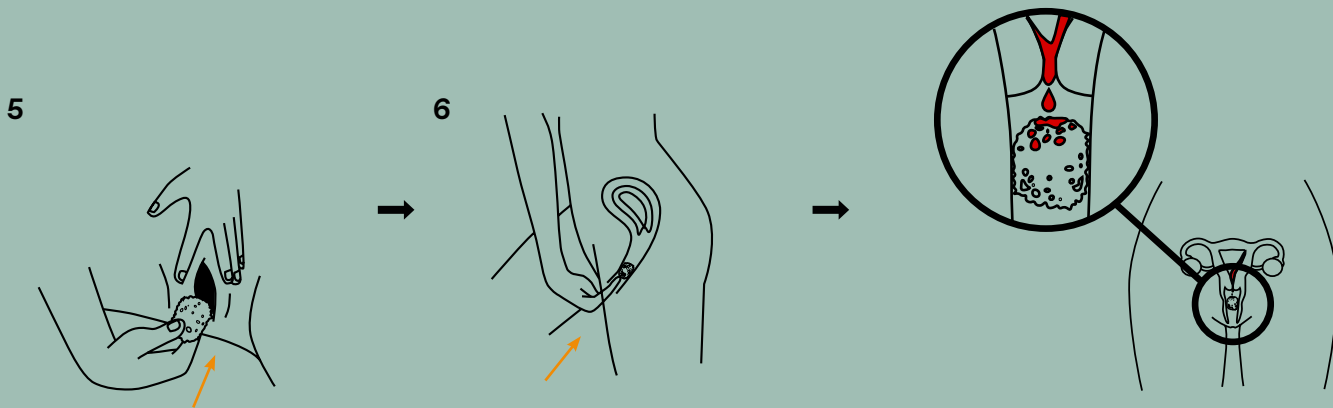
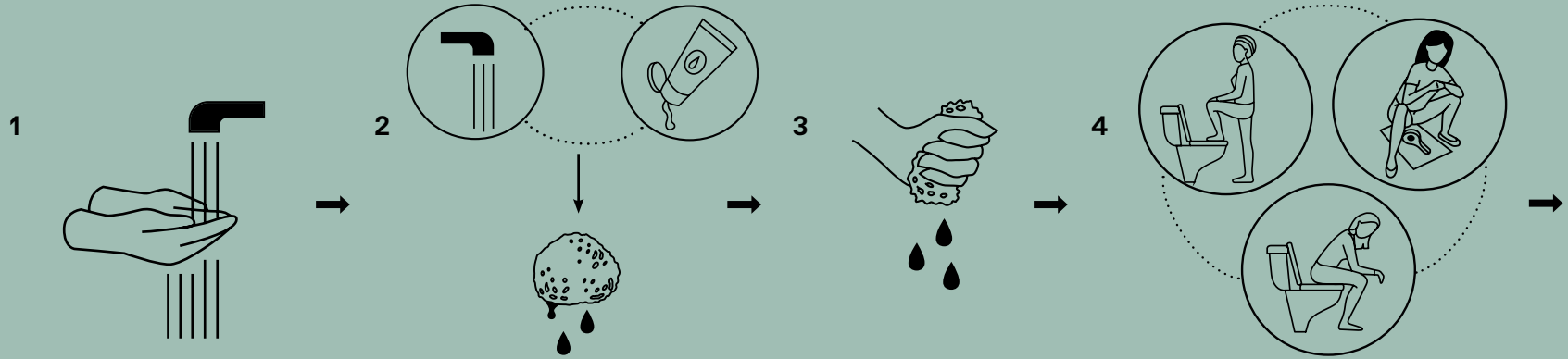


How to Use Period Underwear?





How to Use a Menstrual Sponge?





How to Use a Menstrual Sponge?

7



8



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9



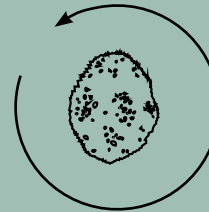
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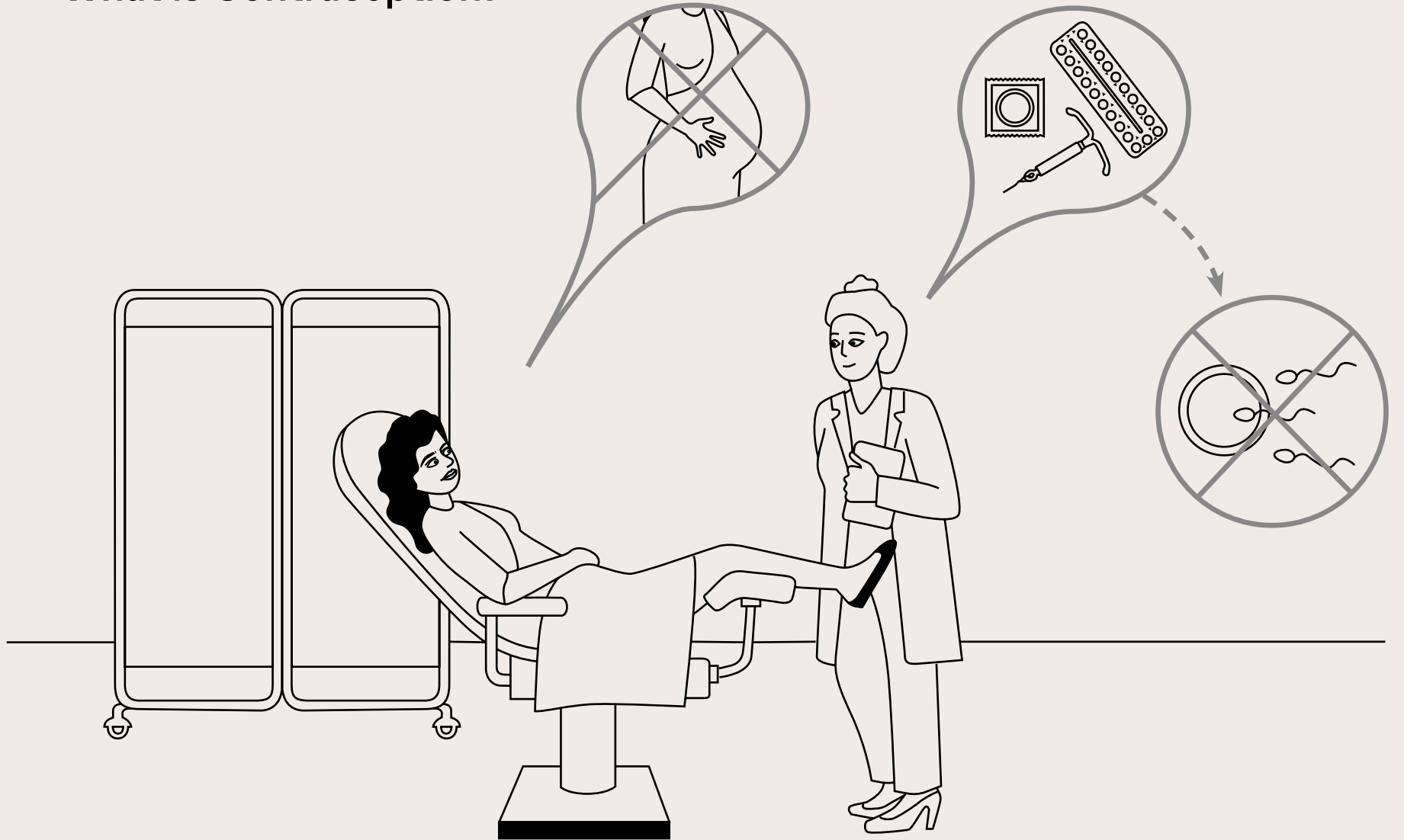
CONTRACEPTION

30 What is Contraception?

31 Birth Control Methods

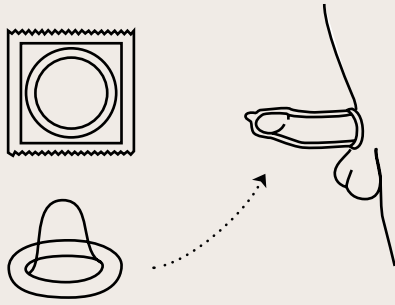


What is Contraception?

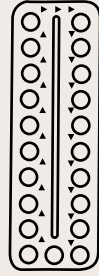


Birth Control Methods

1



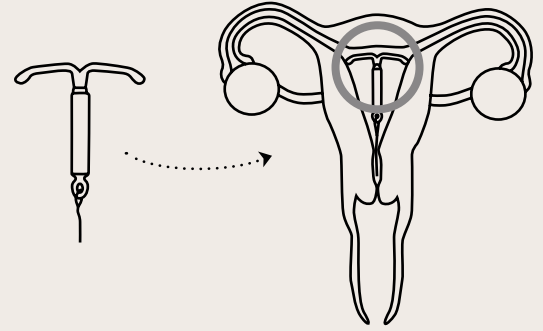
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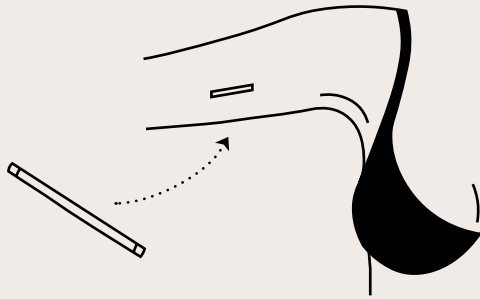
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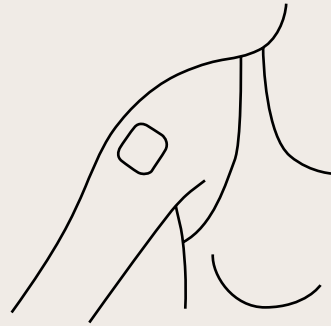
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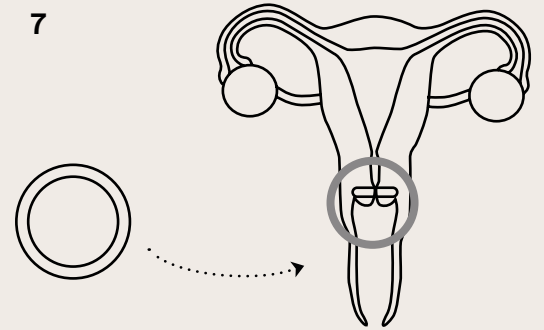
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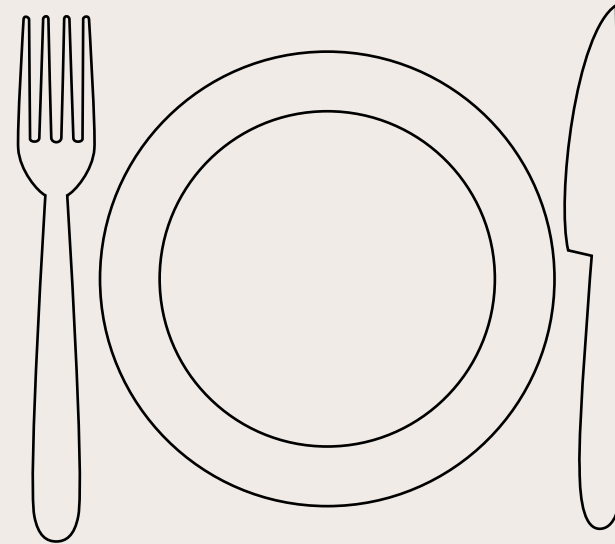


7



MENSTRUAL DIET

33 Recommended food



ABC

Recommended Food



1.



2.



3.



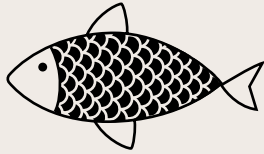
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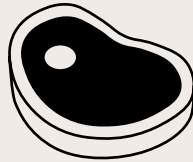
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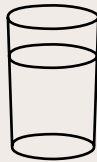
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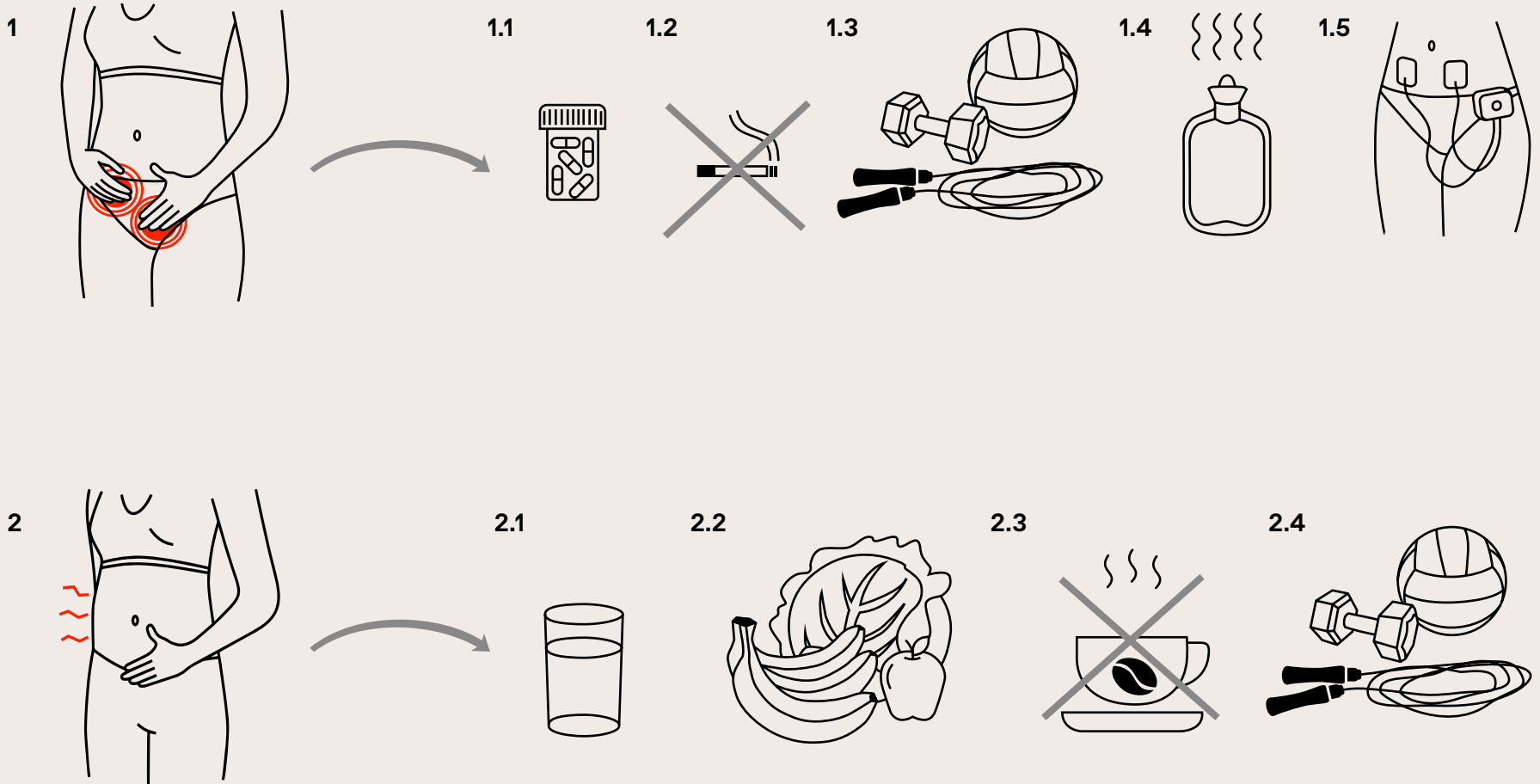
ADVICE

35 Solutions for Period Symptoms

37 How to Track Your Period?



Solutions for Period Symptoms



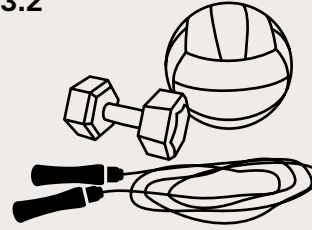
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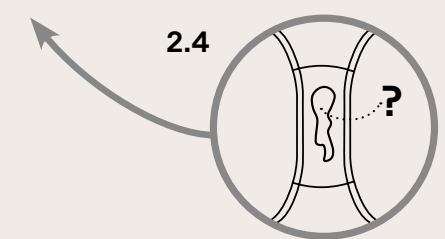
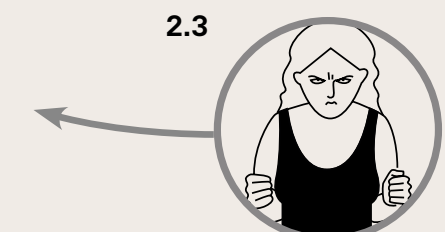
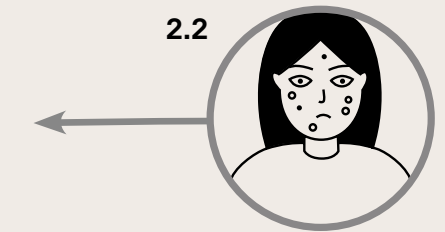
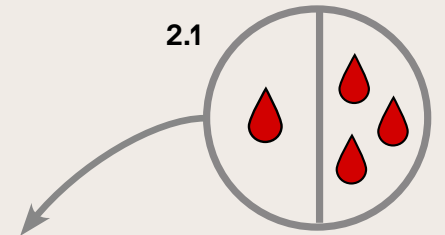
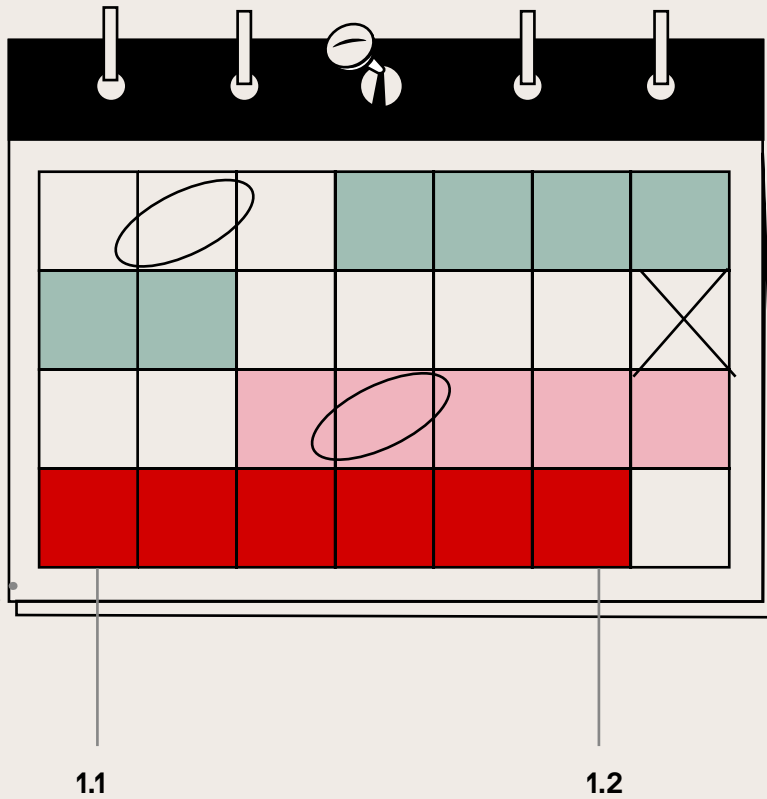
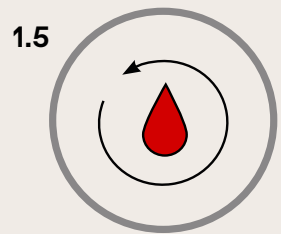
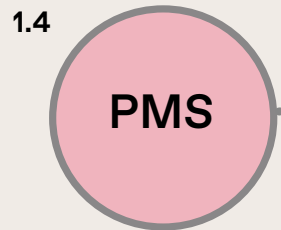
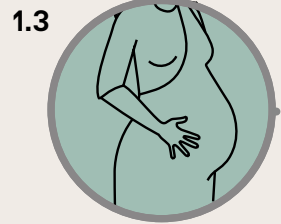
3.2



3.3



How to Track Your Period?



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Female Reproductive System

The female reproductive system is made up of the internal and external sex organs that function in reproduction of new offspring. In humans, the female reproductive system is immature at birth and develops to maturity at puberty to be able to produce gametes, and to carry a fetus to full term.

External organs

The *external female anatomy (1)* includes the pubis and the vulva. The following sections discuss these in more detail.

1.1. Mons pubis

The mons pubis, or public mound, is the fleshy area on the pelvic bone where females typically grow pubic hair.

1.2. Vulva

The vulva refers to the external parts of a female's genitals. It consists of several parts:

1.2.1. Labia majora

These are the fleshy outer lips on either side of the

vaginal opening. The word "labia" is Latin for "lips." These outer lips usually grow pubic hair.

1.2.2. Labia minora

These are the inner lips. They sit inside the outer lips but can be varying sizes. In some people, for example, the inner lips extend beyond the outer lips.

1.2.3. Clitoris

The glans clitoris sits at the top of the vulva, located where the inner lips meet. It is usually around the size of a pea, though size varies from person to person. Only the tip of the clitoris is visible, but it has two shafts that extend into the body by as much as 5 in/ 12.7cm. The clitoris contains many nerve endings that are very sensitive, especially during sexual stimulation.

1.2.4. Clitoral hood

The clitoral hood is the fold of skin that surrounds the head of the clitoris. It protects the clitoris from friction.

1.2.5. Urethral opening

The opening to the urethra sits above the vaginal opening. The urethra connects to the bladder, and the opening is where urine exits the body.

Internal organs

The *internal female anatomy (2)* begins at the vagina, which is the canal that leads from the vulva to the uterus. The cervix separates the vagina from the uterus, and the fallopian tubes connect the ovaries with the uterus. The following sections discuss these organs in more detail:

2.1. Vagina

As mentioned above, the vagina is the canal that connects the vulva with the uterus.



The opening to the vagina is part of the vulva.

The vagina can vary in size, but the average length is about 2.5 to 3 in/ 6.3 to 7.6 cm. That said, it expands in length during arousal.

It also contains special structures called Bartholin's glands. These are two pea-sized glands that sit on either side of the vaginal opening. These glands are responsible for secreting lubrication to keep the vaginal tissues from becoming too dry.

2.2. Cervix

The cervix is the lower portion of the uterus. It is a cylinder-shaped area of tissue that separates the vagina from the rest of the uterus. During birth, the cervix dilates to allow the baby to move through the vagina.

2.3. Uterus

During a person's monthly menstrual cycle, the lining

of the uterus thickens with blood in preparation for the release of an egg from one of the ovaries. This is to prepare a nourishing environment for a fetus if pregnancy occurs.

If pregnancy does not occur, the uterine lining sheds. This is called the menstrual period. It occurs every around 28 days, though cycle length varies between people.

The upper portion of the uterus is connected to the ovaries by the fallopian tubes.

2.4. Ovaries

The ovaries are egg-shaped organs attached to fallopian tubes on the left and right sides of the body. Each ovary is roughly the size of an almond. Most females are born with two ovaries that produce eggs.

In addition to producing eggs, the ovaries also produce hormones. Namely, they release estrogen and progesterone.

2.5. Fallopian Tubes

The fallopian tubes connect the ovaries to the uterus. When the ovaries release an egg, the egg travels down the fallopian tube toward the uterus for potential fertilization.

2.6. Hymen

The hymen is a membrane of tissue that covers the external vaginal opening. Not everyone has a hymen, however.

The hymen can rupture as a result of pelvic injury, sports activity, pelvic examination, sexual intercourse, or childbirth. The absence of a hymen does not mean that a person has been sexually active.



Menstruation

Menstruation, also known by the terms menses, menstrual period, cycle or period is the monthly shedding of the lining of a person's uterus.

What is period?

A period is the part of the menstrual cycle when a person bleeds from her vagina for a few days.

The menstrual blood, which is partly blood and partly tissue from the inside of the *uterus* (→ † **Anatomy, 2.3.**), flows from the uterus through the cervix and out of the body through the vagina.

For most people with uteruses this happens every 28 days or so, but it's common for periods to be more or less frequent than this, ranging from day 21 to day 40 of their menstrual cycle.

Period can last between three and eight days, but it will usually last for about five days. The bleeding tends to be heaviest in the first two days. When period is at its heaviest, the blood will be red.

On lighter days, it may be pink, brown or black.

The loss of blood during period is about 30 to 72ml (5 to 12 teaspoons), although some people bleed more heavily than this. Women with medically heavy periods (menorrhagia) can sometimes bleed up to 400 ml per period.

At what age does menstruation typically begin?

Girls *start menstruating at the average age of 12 (1.)*. However, girls can begin menstruating as early as 8 years of age or as late as 16 years of age.

Women *stop menstruating at menopause (2.)*, which occurs at about the age of 51.

What is a menstrual cycle?

The menstrual cycle is a term used to describe the sequence of events that occur within a person's body as it prepares for the possibility of pregnancy each month. A menstrual cycle is considered to begin on the first

day of a period. The average cycle is 28 days long; however, a cycle can range in length from 21 days to about 35 days.

The steps in the menstrual cycle are triggered by the rise and fall of chemicals in the body called hormones. The pituitary gland in the brain and the ovaries in the female reproductive tract manufacture and release certain hormones at certain times during the menstrual cycle that cause the organs of the reproductive tract to respond in certain ways.

3. Phases of the menstrual cycle

There are four main phases of the menstrual cycle:

- 3.1. Menses phase
Typically lasts from day one to day five, is the time when the lining of the uterus is actually shed out through the vagina if pregnancy has not occurred.

Most people bleed for 3 to 5 days, but a period lasting



only 2 days to as many as 7 days is still considered a normal one.

3.2. Follicular phase

Typically takes place from days six to 14. During this time, the level of the hormone estrogen rises, which causes the lining of the uterus (called the endometrium) to grow and thicken. In addition, another hormone, follicle-stimulating hormone, causes follicles in the ovaries to grow.

During days 10 to 14, one of the developing follicles will form a fully mature egg (ovum).

3.3. Ovulation

This phase occurs roughly at about day 14 in a 28-day menstrual cycle. A sudden increase in another hormone, luteinizing hormone, causes the ovary to release its egg.

This event is called ovulation.

3.4. Luteal phase

Lasts from about day 15 to day 28. After the egg is released from the ovary it begins to travel through the fallopian tubes to the uterus.

The level of the hormone progesterone rises to help prepare the uterine lining for pregnancy.

If the egg becomes fertilized by a sperm and attaches itself to the uterine wall, the person becomes pregnant.

If pregnancy does not occur, estrogen and progesterone levels drop and the thickened lining of the uterus is shed during the menstrual period.

Menstrual symptoms

Symptoms accompanying menstruation depend on each person, some will have no discomfort others will experience several accompanying conditions.

However, while some symptoms are absolutely normal others are worth consulting with a doctor.

4. What are the symptoms of a normal menstruation?

- 4.1. Moodiness
- 4.2. Trouble sleeping
- 4.3. Food cravings
- 4.4. Cramps in the lower abdomen and back
- 4.5. Bloating
- 4.6. Tenderness in the breasts
- 4.7. Acne

5. What are the alarming symptoms of menstruation?

It is advisable for people to consult a doctor or gynecologist for any of the following symptoms:



- 5.1. Unusual vaginal discharge
- 5.2. Irregular periods that change in length and flow from one month to the next one
- 5.3. Bleeding after menopause
- 5.4. Missing three or more periods
- 5.5. Foul-smelling vaginal odor
- 5.6. Thick gray or white vaginal discharge
- 5.7. Itching in or around the vagina
- 5.8. Fever
- 5.9. Anyone who is pregnant and notices any bleeding or unusual vaginal discharge should speak with their doctor or obstetrician.

Hormonal process

The menstrual cycle is regulated by several intricate hormonal circuits all working together in harmony.

The hypothalamus (a part of the brain), the pituitary gland (also in the brain), and the ovaries. The hypothalamus releases a hormone called gonadotropin-releasing

hormone (GnRH) and this process can be easily disturbed by stress, sleep disturbance, and weight loss or gain.

GnRH triggers the pituitary gland to release the hormone follicle stimulating hormone (FSH), which tells the ovary to start developing follicles (eggs).

The follicles produce estrogen, which makes the lining of the uterus thicken. The estrogen provides feedback to the pituitary gland. When estrogen levels are high enough, the pituitary releases a hormone called luteinizing hormone (LH), which triggers ovulation.

After ovulation the egg heads down the fallopian tube to the uterus, and the tissue left behind (like an eggshell, but soft), called the corpus luteum, produces progesterone. While estrogen thickens the uterine lining (think of it like stacking bricks), progesterone stabilizes the lining (a bit like mortar).

The corpus luteum can only produce progesterone for approximately 14 days unless it gets a signal from a pregnancy. Without fertilization, the corpus luteum shrinks and the progesterone is rapidly withdrawn and this causes the lining of the uterus to come out as a period. And we are back at the beginning of the cycle, with day 1 being the day bleeding starts. Estrogen and progesterone have wide-ranging effects beyond the ovaries, uterus, and vagina.

The cyclic changes can affect mood, the immune system, and even sensitivity to touch.

Pregnancy and period

Periods only happen when you're not pregnant. During pregnancy menstrual bleeding stops. Period usually returns a few weeks after giving birth. Although bleeding can occur during pregnancy and it might be confused with a menstrual period.

Implantation bleeding is the most common type of bleeding.



When the fertilized egg, now an embryo, implants into the uterine lining, it sometimes causes a little blood to shed. This can be mistaken for a normal period, especially since implantation often occurs at about the same time as the expected next period.

Other bleeding during pregnancy that can be mistaken for a period, for example, is an early miscarriage. However, such confusion usually occurs when a person is unaware that they are pregnant.

Menopause

Menopause is defined as one year without menstruation, which means that after this time it is no longer possible to get pregnant. At the time of menopause, the body stops producing eggs, which means it stops ovulating.

Before menopause people experience several symptoms. This phase is called perimenopause. Skipping periods during this time is common and expected.

Often, menstrual periods will skip a month and return, or skip several months and then start monthly cycles again for a few months. Periods also tend to happen on shorter cycles, so they are closer together. Despite irregular periods, pregnancy is possible.

If you've skipped a period but aren't sure you've started the menopausal transition, consider a pregnancy test.

Symptoms of menopause

In the months or years leading up to menopause (perimenopause), you might experience these signs and symptoms:

- Irregular periods
- Vaginal dryness
- Hot flashes
- Chills
- Night sweats
- Sleep problems
- Mood changes
- Weight gain and slowed metabolism
- Thinning hair and dry skin
- Loss of breast fullness



Menstrual Blood and Vaginal Discharge

Menstrual blood has venous blood (what you normally bleed when you are cut) as well as vaginal discharge and cells from the lining of the uterus (called the endometrium). It can look like blood, it can look like red mucus, it can be almost black, and it can be clotted—none of that is abnormal medically.

Sometimes menstrual blood can even look so much like tissue, it could be confused with a miscarriage. This medical phenomenon is called a decidual cast, which occurs when a large portion of the endometrium comes off at once.

Period blood is normally liquid as the individual cells of the endometrium are not stuck together. However, imbalance between the hormones progesterone and estrogen can cause the cells to come off in sheets as opposed to individually (think a hundred Lego blocks attached together versus individual blocks).

Color of menstrual blood and vaginal discharge

Menstrual blood can change in color and texture from month to month or even during a single period. Hormonal changes, as well as a person's diet, lifestyle, age, and environment, can all cause variations in period blood. Infections, pregnancy, and, in rare cases, cervical cancer, can cause unusual blood color, irregular bleeding or unusual vaginal discharge.

1. Brown or dark red (2.)

Like black blood, brown or dark red is a sign of old blood, and it may appear at the beginning or end of a period. Brown or dark red blood has not had as long to oxidize as black blood and can appear in a variety of shades.

3. Bright red

Bright red blood indicates fresh blood and a steady flow. A period may start with bright red bleeding and darken towards the end of the period.

Some people may find that their blood stays bright red throughout their period.

Rarely, bright red bleeding may be a sign of cervical cancer. Other symptoms of cervical cancer include:

- Heavier periods
- Periods that last longer than normal
- Bleeding after sexual intercourse
- Foul-smelling vaginal discharge
- Pain in the lower back, pelvis, or legs
- Loss of appetite
- Unexplained weight loss

4. Black

Black blood can appear at the beginning or end of a person's period. The color is typically a sign of old blood or blood that has taken longer to leave the uterus and has had time to oxidize, first turning brown or dark red and then eventually becoming black.



Black blood can sometimes also indicate a blockage inside a person's vagina. Other symptoms of a vaginal blockage can include:

- Foul-smelling discharge
- Fever
- Difficulty urinating
- Itching or swelling in or around the vagina

5. Pink

Pink blood or spotting can occur when period blood mixes with cervical fluid.

Using hormonal birth control can lower estrogen levels in the body, which can lead to a lighter flow with a pinkish hue during periods.

Sexual intercourse can create small tears in the vagina or the cervix. Blood from these tears can mix with vaginal fluids and exit a person's body as pink discharge.

Other causes of pink period blood can include:

- Significant weight loss
- Unhealthy diet
- Anemia

6. Orange

Blood that mixes with cervical fluid can also appear orange.

Orange blood or discharge often indicates an infection, such as bacterial vaginosis or trichomoniasis. People with orange blood should check for other telltale symptoms.

Although orange period blood or discharge does not always indicate an infection, it is a good idea to see a doctor for an evaluation.

7. Gray

Gray discharge is usually a sign of bacterial vaginosis, a condition that occurs due to an imbalance between beneficial and harmful bacteria in the vagina.

Other symptoms of bacterial vaginosis include:

- Itching in and around the vagina
- Foul-smelling vaginal odor that people often describe as “fishy”
- Burning or painful urination

People with symptoms of bacterial vaginosis should see a doctor or gynecologist.

Doctors usually prescribe antibiotics to treat bacterial vaginosis.

Bleeding inbetween periods

Unusual spotting or bleeding between menstrual cycles may be a sign of a sexually transmitted infection, such as chlamydia or gonorrhea. Growths in the uterine lining, called polyps or fibroids, can also cause unusually heavy bleeding.



Bleeding during pregnancy

Bleeding and spotting from the vagina during pregnancy are common. Up to 1 out of 4 of all pregnant people have some bleeding or spotting during their pregnancy.

Brown blood or spotting can sometimes also be an early sign of pregnancy that doctors refer to as implantation bleeding. It can also indicate a miscarriage or an ectopic pregnancy, which is when the fertilized egg implants in a fallopian tube instead of the uterus.

It is important for people who experience spotting or vaginal bleeding during pregnancy to speak to their doctor or obstetrician.

During pregnancy, pink discharge that contains tissue and occurs alongside cramps may indicate a miscarriage. It is important for people who experience vaginal bleeding while pregnant to see their doctor or obstetrician.

Lochia

Dark red or brown vaginal discharge that occurs after giving birth is called lochia, or postpartum bleeding. Lochia is not a cause for concern and is the body's way of expelling excess blood and tissue from the uterus.

Lochia typically begins with bright red blood and then transitions to a darker shade as the flow decreases. Over time, the discharge will then become lighter in both color and amount.

The duration of lochia varies from person to person, but it usually passes within the first few months after delivery. Women who experience very heavy bleeding after giving birth should see a doctor.

Not all people experience lochia after giving birth. Women may also experience irregular periods after giving birth due to changes in hormone levels.



Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

PMS is a series of physical, mental and emotional discomforts, which usually occur 7-10 days before the start of menstruation.

It's estimated that as many as 3 of every 4 menstruating people have experienced some form of premenstrual syndrome.

For some, the physical pain and emotional stress are severe enough to affect their daily lives. Regardless of symptom severity, the signs and symptoms generally disappear within four days after the start of the menstrual period for most people.

Emotional and behavioral signs and symptoms:

1. Tension or anxiety
2. Crying spells or depressed mood
3. Mood swings and irritability or anger
4. Appetite changes and food cravings
5. Trouble falling asleep (insomnia)

Physical signs and symptoms:

6. Joint or muscle pain
7. Headache
8. Fatigue
9. Abdominal bloating
10. Breast tenderness
11. Constipation or
12. Diarrhea
13. Acne flare-ups

Causes

Exactly what causes premenstrual syndrome is unknown, but several factors may contribute to the condition:

- Cyclic changes in hormones. Signs and symptoms of premenstrual syndrome change with hormonal fluctuations and disappear with pregnancy and menopause.
- Chemical changes in the brain. Fluctuations of serotonin, a brain chemical that's thought to play a crucial role in mood states, could trigger PMS symptoms. Insufficient amounts of serotonin may

contribute to premenstrual depression, as well as to fatigue, food cravings and sleep problems.

- Depression. Some people with severe premenstrual syndrome have undiagnosed depression, though depression alone does not cause all of the symptoms

PMDD

A small number of people with premenstrual syndrome have disabling symptoms every month. This form of PMS is called premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD).

PMDD signs and symptoms include:

- Depression
- Mood swings
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability and tension



Sanitary Products

Sanitary products, also called feminine hygiene products, are personal care items used during menstruation. They soak up or collect the blood released during period and make monthly bleeding easier to manage by preventing blood from leaking through clothing.

It is important that a person choose the product that works best for them, because studies tell us what people find most distressing is not the volume of blood, but the fact that the blood has leaked onto their clothes.

Sometimes leaking can be a sign of a heavy period, but sometimes it indicates the wrong product choice.

As menstruation is such a fundamental part of being a person with uterus of reproductive age, taking the time to explore and sample the available sanitary products can help make periods more manageable.

The main types of sanitary products available on market are:

1. Pads
2. Tampons
3. Menstrual cups and discs
4. Period underwear
5. Sponges

Those products are either disposable or reusable. Sanitary napkins, tampons, and pantyliners are disposable. Menstrual cups, cloth menstrual pads, period panties, and sponges are reusable.

What is important when choosing sanitary products?

Deciding on which sanitary products to use can be influenced by a range of factors, including:

- Cost
- Environmental impact
- How often the product needs to be changed throughout the day
- Local availability
- Heaviness of flow
- Personal preference and/or recommendations by friends and family

The range of sanitary products available today means that the majority of people are able to manage their periods safely, comfortably and with dignity; in contrast to days gone by when old rags and sheep wool were commonly used to soak up menstrual blood.



Buying Sanitary Products

Buying hygiene products can be distressing for some people. Especially when it is the first time. However, buying feminine hygiene products is not so complicated. The availability and price of these products will vary by area where you live, but it can be assumed that the following steps are universal and can be helpful for most regions and countries.

Where can I buy sanitary products?

Sanitary products are available in most larger *drugstores (1.1.)*, *drug store chains (1.2.)*, *hypermarkets (1.3.)*, or even *gas stations (1.4.)*.

Although the largest selection will probably be in drugstores so for more specific needs such as buying a menstrual cup or disc, it is recommended to go there.

There are also many companies that offer their products online. If you are looking for organic, sustainable or reusable products, the online offer will be much wider.

What product to choose?

If you are buying products for someone else the first thing you need to ask about is the *type of product (2.1.)*.

If you are buying a product for yourself and you are not sure which product to choose you can use the guide on the following pages, which describes each product in more detail.

However, if you do not know what to choose or do not have the opportunity to ask, the safest option is a pad.

What size or absorbency should I choose?

Once you have decided on the type of product, the next important piece of information is the *absorbency (3.1.)* or *the size (3.2.)* suitable for bleeding or the time of day.

Often the same product is available in different sizes. They are larger or smaller or of different shapes to fit everyone's body.

Absorbency is usually indicated by a chart or an intensity bar along with terminology such as mini/light, medium/normal, maxi/super.

There are also *nighttime and daytime (3.3.)* products available on the market. These are easy to distinguish. Most products without any markings are day products. Those that come in navy/black or blue and have a sign like overnight/night are meant to be worn while sleeping. They are usually larger and more absorbent.

If you don't know how absorbent the product you're choosing for yourself or another person you're buying it for should be, it's best to choose normal/regular/medium, which will be suitable for most people.

In the store

The range of products in the store can seem overwhelming. Focus on the type of product you are looking for, such as sanitary pads or tampons, and among them choose the suitable one.



It's a good idea to *have products with different absorbencies (4.1.)* that you can use for day and night or alternate depending on your flow. For pads, it's a good idea to buy a daytime and a nighttime version. Night-time pads are longer and will provide comfort while you sleep without leaking.

Ask for an advice

In every drugstore or pharmacy you will find qualified staff who will advise you on the right products. In every drugstore or pharmacy you will find qualified staff who can advise you on which preparations are suitable and how to use them.

If there is no one like that you can also ask other customers especially female ones. Surely many women have experience in this subject and will help you choose the right product.



Toxic Shock Syndrome (mTSS)

Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a rare but life-threatening condition caused by bacteria getting into the body and releasing harmful toxins. It's often associated with tampon use in young women, but it can affect anyone of any age, including men and children.

What is Toxic Shock Syndrome?

Toxic shock syndrome, or TSS, is a severe response to a toxin that has entered the bloodstream.

A toxin is a substance made by an organism — bacteria, plants, and animals can all make toxins. Two types of bacteria can produce a toxin capable of causing TSS:

- Group A strep (*Streptococcus*), the same bacteria that causes strep throat
- Staph aureus (*Staphylococcus aureus*)

Group A strep doesn't thrive in the vagina, so it doesn't cause menstrual TSS (mTSS).

Most cases of mTSS are due to a toxin called TSS-1 made by the bacteria *Staph aureus*.

TSS is defined as menstrual if it occurs during or within 2–3 days of the end of a period.

Nonmenstrual TSS affects women and men equally and typically happens after surgery or an injury, like a burn. It affects about 0.3/100,000 people a year.

Symptoms

While following symptoms could be due to a different condition, it's important to contact your doctor or call 112 as soon as possible if you have a combination of these symptoms:

1. Redness of eyes, *mouth (2.)* or *vagina area (3.)*
4. Fever
5. Low blood pressure
6. Sunburn-like rash that peels
7. Dizziness
8. Muscle pain
9. Vomiting
10. Diarrhea

When to get medical advice?

Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a medical emergency. It's very unlikely that you have TSS, but previously mentioned symptoms should not be ignored. Due to TSS organs can shut down, and lack of blood flow to limbs can even lead to amputations.

If you have severe symptoms or they are rapidly getting worse go to your nearest hospital or call 112 and ask for an ambulance immediately.

If you're wearing a tampon, remove it straight away. Also tell your doctor if you've been using a tampon, recently had a burn or skin injury, or if you have a skin infection such as a boil. If a doctor suspects you have TSS, you'll be referred to hospital immediately.

Treatment

The average duration of hospitalization is six days, and some people are sick enough to need intensive care.



With good medical care, the risk of death is less than 4 percent. Survivors can have recurrences, memory loss, and serious health problems.

Cases

Between 1979 and 1980, there were 1,264 cases of mTSS in the United States and 72 women, 6 percent of those affected, died.

The risk of mTSS has dropped and now affects approximately 1/100,000 women of reproductive age.

In 2015, the last year we have full data, 47 women in the U.S. had TSS (most of those were likely menstrual related, but the data doesn't distinguish between mTSS and nonmenstrual TSS).

Possibility of getting sick and mechanics of bacteria

The bacteria *Staph aureus* is a colonizer, meaning many of us carry it on our body but it doesn't cause any problems under typical circumstances.

Approximately 10 percent of people with uteruses of reproductive age are colonized vaginally with *Staph aureus* (wearing tampons does not increase the risk of colonization) and 1 percent have a strain capable of making TSS-1.

These are the only people at potential risk for mTSS. The amount of *Staph aureus* in the vagina increases during menstruation when iron from blood increases TSS-1 production.

Fortunately, the body has natural defense mechanisms against TSS: 80 percent of people with uteruses have protective antibodies that can neutralize the toxin (this is why younger women have the highest risk of mTSS: they have had less time to develop antibodies), and some people lack the receptor on their vaginal tissues needed for the toxin to attach to cells and gain entry to the bloodstream.

As 70 percent of women have used tampons at some time, 1 percent of women have TSS-1

producing bacteria, and less than 0.01 percent of women of reproductive age a year get mTSS.

Practical Advice for mTSS Safety

It is impossible to bring the risk with vaginal products to zero, but considering how many people use tampons and how few get mTSS, the risk is low.

The risk of mTSS is the highest for younger people. That doesn't mean fifteen-year-olds shouldn't use tampons, it is just information to use when you make decisions about your body.

Practical tampon advice

Things to do or consider to minimize the risk of mTSS when using tampons:

- Use the lowest absorbancy. Some manufacturers make boxes with a range of sizes. If all you have is a large or a super plus, then you are likely using a tampon that is too absorbent on lighter days.



- Do not assume all-cotton tampons are safer. The latest study suggests rayon blends are safer. Whether the lab study translates to real life is not known.
- Be mindful of trauma with insertion and removal.
- Using a less absorbent tampon on lighter days may help.
- Change your tampon every eight hours. Although this recommendation is not based on hard science, it seems the best advice for now.
- Changing more frequently won't reduce your risk of getting mTSS. In fact, it could even increase risk, as more insertions mean more oxygen and carbon dioxide in the vagina and more trauma.

Practical menstrual cup advice

Things to do or consider to minimize the risk of mTSS when using menstrual cup:

- Do not assume they have a lower risk than tampons.
- One study showed they are more favorable for growth of *Staph aureus* and TSS-1 than tampons.
- Choose the smallest cup. This could mean having cups of different sizes for light and heavy days.
- Have two cups. The manufacturer instructions for rinsing between emptying are not sufficient to kill TSS-1. The cups should be boiled between insertions, so keeping a clean one on hand is likely best.



Pads

Pads, sometimes also called sanitary pads or sanitary napkins, are rectangles of absorbent material that attach to the inside of an underwear and catch menstrual blood.

Some pads have extra material on the sides that's called "wings". These „wings“ fold over the edges of your underwear to help hold the pad in place and prevent leaking.

Some pads are made out of disposable materials — you use them once and throw them away. Other pads are made from fabric, and can be washed and reused.

There are many different types of pads, including:

- maxi
- mini
- super
- slender
- overnight
- scented

Some people have heavier bleeding and others a lighter one.

Menstrual bleeding can also vary during the cycle. Most people have light days and heavier days. Pads may vary in size or absorbency to provide adequate leakage protection for different flows.

It is important to select a product that fits one's needs. This includes trying to find a sanitary pad large enough to not worry about leaking, but still small enough to be comfortable.

Finding the right pad for different menstrual flows may take some experimentation but is necessary to make menstruation comfortable.

If you have sensitive skin or have allergies, choose unscented sanitary napkins. These can irritate the vagina or cause an allergic reaction in some people.

Keep in mind that sanitary napkins are not suitable for all activities, such as swimming.

How to use a pad?

The sanitary pads are relatively easy to use and do not require inserting anything inside, which is why many people who are just beginning to menstruate start out with pads.

Putting on a pad

Step-by-step instructions in putting on a sanitary pad.

1. Sit comfortably on the toilet or chair and prepare the pads.
2. Take the pad out of the packaging and unfold it.
3. Remove the protective stripe at the back of the pad.
4. Stick the pad in your underwear using the sticky strip on the back.
 - 4.1. If your pad has wings remove the protective stripes from them. Stick the wings to the back of your underwear.



Changing a pad

Step-by-step instructions in changing a sanitary pad.

5. Change your pad every few hours, or when it's soaked with blood.
6. When your pad is soaked remove it and wrap used pads in the wrapper or toilet paper.
7. Throw the used pad in the trash. Do not throw used pads in the toilet. Flushing used pads or wrappers will clog the toilet up.

How many sanitary pads should you use in a day?

There isn't a single right answer to that question because there are a few factors to consider that might change how many pads per day you'd need.

A very rough estimate would be four or five pads, assuming that you're getting at least the recommended 7 hours of sleep at night.

Keep in mind these factors that might make you want (or need) to use more:

- Exercise.
Sweat can make things wetter and smellier down there. Plus, pads can shift and squish with more exercise, and there's good possibility that you'll end up with an uncomfortable pad wedgie after a Pilates or spin class.
- Hot weather.
Getting too damp down there is no good, and the hotter it is, the more moisture you can expect.
- Your plans.
Depending on what you've got planned for the day, an extra pad change before you head out might be a good idea even if your pad's still relatively dry. Think: date night, an afternoon of meetings, or a long flight when getting up to change it is less than ideal.

- Heavy flow days.
The first day or two of a period are usually the heaviest, so you'll probably need to change more often on those days.

How many sanitary pads should I use per night?

Unless you get more than 12 hours of sleep on the regular or have an unusually heavy period (which you should definitely talk about with your doctor), one pad should be sufficient.

It is also recommended to use an overnight pad. They are usually longer and more absorbent than regular sanitary pads.



Tampons

Tampons are small tubes of cotton wool that you insert into your vagina to soak up the blood before it comes out of your body.

Various kinds of tampons are available on the market, but there are two main types:

- ones that come with an applicator
- ones that come without an applicator

In both cases, there's a string at one end of the tampon, which you pull to remove it.

Tampons that come with applicators have small sticks made of cardboard or plastic that help you put the tampon in your vagina.

An applicator-style tampon with a rounded top can be especially helpful for beginners.

Tampons that don't have an applicator have to be inserted inside with your finger.

Most common tampon sizes

Tampons come in different sizes. These sizes indicate absorbency. The larger the tampon, the more blood it will absorb and the less often you will need to change it.

Here are some of the most popular tampon sizes:

- mini/small — recommended for first days
- medium — medium flow
- super/ ultra — heavier days or overnight

It's best to use the lowest or lightest absorbency that lasts you a few hours.

How to use a tampon?

If the tampon is inserted correctly, you should not be able to feel it inside you. If you can feel it or it hurts, it might not be in properly.

If it is the first time that you use a tampon, try to do so on a heavier flow day. This will make the tampon slip in easier.

Inserting a tampon

Step-by-step instructions for inserting a tampon.

1. Wash your hands and get into a comfortable position. You can squat, put one leg up, or sit on the toilet.
2. Unwrap the tampon from the foil. If your tampon has an applicator pull the bottom part of the applicator.
3. Push the tampon or the applicator into your vagina. Inserting a tampon is more comfortable if you're relaxed.
 - 3.1. If you have a tampon with an applicator push the plunger all the way into the barrel with your pointer finger. This will release the tampon into your body. The plunger should now be inside the barrel.
 - 3.2. Still holding the finger grips, gently pull out the applicator.



4. Throw the wrapper and applicator in the trash. Don't flush them!

If you're having trouble inserting a tampon, ask someone you trust (like your mom, sister, or another person you trust who has used tampons) to show you how to put the tampon into your vagina.

You can also put a little bit of lubricant on the tip of the tampon or applicator for easier application.

Changing a tampon

Step-by-step instructions in changing a tampon.

5. It's best to change your tampon every 4-8 hours. Don't leave your tampon in for more than 8 hours.

You can wear a tampon overnight, but put it in right before bed and change it as soon as you get up in the morning.

6. Tampons have a string at one end that hangs out of your vagina. You take the tampon out by gently pulling the string. It's easier to take your tampon out when it's wet from absorbing the max amount of period flow it can.
7. Wrap used tampons in toilet paper and throw them away in the trash. Don't flush them!

Can a tapon get lost inside you?

It is not possible for a tampon to get stuck or lost inside you. Your vagina holds it firmly in place and it expands inside you as it soaks up the blood.



Menstrual Cups

A menstrual cup is a reusable feminine hygiene product. It's a small, flexible funnel-shaped cup made of rubber or silicone that you insert into your vagina to catch and collect period fluid.

Cups can hold more blood than other methods, leading many people to use them as an eco-friendly alternative to tampons. And depending on your flow, you can wear a cup for up to 12 hours.

Choosing a size

If you're interested in using a menstrual cup, talk with your gynecologist. Although you can buy any of the brands online or in most stores, you'll first have to find out what size you need. Most menstrual cup brands sell small and large versions.

To figure out the right menstrual cup size for you, you and your doctor should consider:

- Your age
- Length of your cervix
- Cup capacity

- Whether or not you have a heavy flow
- Firmness and flexibility of the cup
- Strength of your pelvic floor muscles
- If you've given birth vaginally

Smaller menstrual cups are usually recommended for people younger than 30 years old who haven't delivered vaginally.

How to use a menstrual cup?

There are different kinds of cups, and they all come with specific step-by-step instructions and pictures. Cups may look kind of big, but most people can't feel them once they're in.

Inserting a menstrual cup

Step-by-step instructions for inserting a tampon.

1. Wash your hands and get into a comfortable position. You can squat, put one leg up, or sit on the toilet with your knees apart.

2. Squeeze or fold the cup so it's narrow.
3. Slide it into your vagina with your fingers. It is best to use the directions that came with your cup to figure out the best way to squeeze it and how to place the cup.
4. Some cups need to be put high into vagina, near cervix. Others sit in the lower part of vagina. If your cup feels uncomfortable or in the wrong spot, take it out and try again.

Putting a cup in your vagina is more comfortable if you're relaxed.

If you are having trouble inserting a menstrual cup, ask someone you trust (like your mom, sister, or another person you trust) to show you how to put it in your vagina.

Putting in a cup shouldn't hurt, but it may take some practice in the beginning. It may even take a couple of periods until you feel like you've gotten the hang of it.



If putting in a cup is very painful, talk with a doctor or nurse about it. You may have a medical condition, or it may be that your hymen is covering the opening to your vagina. Either way, a doctor or nurse can help you figure out why it's causing pain and figure out what to do about it.

You can wear a pad as a backup in case your cup leaks, but you can't wear a tampon and a cup at the same time.

Removing a menstrual cup

Step-by-step instructions in removing and reusing a menstrual cup.

5. You wear a menstrual cup for 8-12 hours at a time, or until it's full. Wash your hands before removing the cup.
6. Some menstrual cups have a little stem that you pull on to take it out. Others are removed by hooking a finger around the rim, squeezing it, and pulling it out.

7. Once it's out, empty the cup into the sink or toilet.
8. Most cups are reusable: you use the same cup over and over. Wash your menstrual cup before using it again.

To be sure it is clean, it is recommended to boil the cup at least between each menstrual cycle to keep it fresh and clean.

If you are in a place where you can't wash your cup, just empty it and put it back in. You can wash it later when you're in a private bathroom or at home.

Always follow the cleaning and storage directions that came with your cup.

9. After cleaning you can use the cup again.



Period Underwear

Period underwear, also known as period panties or menstrual underwear, are absorbent clothing designed to be worn during menstruation. It is a reusable option to manage period.

These garments are different from regular underwear because they have multiple layers usually made of microfiber polyester.

This makes period underwear more absorbent than conventional tampons or sanitary pads. They're designed to keep moisture away from your skin as they soak up menstrual blood.

Absorbancy

Brands usually come in different levels of absorbency, so you can choose a pair that works best for you on a particular day.

Most pairs of period underwear are highly absorbent. Depending on the manufacturer they can absorb from one tampon of blood up to a few. But if your flow is heavy, it's a good idea to check

from time to time and see if you need to change them.

Some people also use period underwear alongside other products, like tampons or menstrual cups, to add another layer of protection. But you can use period underwear by itself.

Shape

Besides classic panties, other versions of period underwear are available on the market: period boy shorts or period boxer briefs. These products may cut back on body dysphoria for transgender or gender non-conforming people.

How to use menstrual underwear?

When you start your cycle, you'll use *period underwear (1.)* to catch the blood. You'll put them on just like *a regular pair of underwear (2.)*.

It's important to *change and clean them at least every 12 hours, or as needed (3.)*. Many brands come with an antimicrobial layer to get rid of any odor.

But switching them out regularly will also help keep you fresh.

If you have a heavy flow or you're wearing light-flow period underwear, you may need to change your period underwear more often than once a day, or get some extra help from a tampon, pad, or menstrual cup.

Washing period underwear

Your period underwear will come with instructions that explain the best way to wash them.

You can machine wash your period underwear *in cold water on a delicate cycle (4.)*. You can also put them in a washable mesh bag first. Avoid *fabric softener (4.1.)* or *bleach (4.2.)*, as these can have a negative effect on how efficiently your period pants work. Do not put them in dryer.

You can also hand wash your period underwear using gentle products and letting them dry naturally.



After washing and drying, the menstrual underwear is ready to be *used again (5.)*.

How many pairs of period underwear do I need per cycle?

If you're first trying them out, you'll probably want several pairs to replace your traditional period products on your lighter days.

If you decide to commit, you'll likely want a full five- to seven-day set depending on the length of your flow, so you're not laundering every other day.

You can also consider a sleep-specific pair or two: If you want to sleep worry-free, look for a cut that fits a little more snug (go for stretchy fabrics) with extra coverage for side and rear leak protection.



Menstrual Sponges

A menstrual sponge can be one of two things: part of a real, living sea sponge or part of a synthetic one. They are highly absorbent sanitary products and can be used like a tampon but without the string. Sponges are reusable and can be used for six to twelve months.

A sea sponge is an aquatic organism made of a substance called spongin. Sea sponges are living organisms that attach to underwater surfaces and continuously filter sea water to support their organic functions.

They are incredibly absorbent, and they expand to retain the liquid inside of them. Some companies market sea sponges as a natural alternative to other period products.

Are menstrual sponges worth considering?

Just like any sanitary product, sponges have their upsides and downsides, which are worth thinking about before buying.

Advantages

- Sponges are reusable for up to 6/12 months, which makes them budget-friendly and good for the environment.
- If they're natural, there's no fragrances or synthetic ingredients, which could cause irritation.
- They are renewable and sustainable products.
- They might be comfortable. Once squeezed inside, the sponge should adjust to the shape of your body.

Disadvantages

- They are messy to use.
- They require a lot of caution to be used safely and can lead to infections.
- They could break apart while you are inserting or removing them.
- Absorbency could be tough to figure out if your sponge isn't factory-made.

How to use a menstrual sponge?

Sea sponges vary in shape and size. But whether a sponge is natural or synthetic, the steps you would take to use it are the same.

Inserting a menstrual sponge

Step-by-step instructions for inserting a menstrual sponge.

1. Wash your hands.
2. Wet the sponge with water or a little water-based lube.
3. Squeeze out any excess liquid.
4. Get comfortable. Sit on the toilet, stand with one leg up, or lower into a squat.
5. Separate the folds of your labia and *push the sponge (6.)* into your vagina as if you're inserting a tampon.

How often to change a sponge?

Though there's no hard data on this, sponge sellers recommend no more than 8 hours (similar to tampons). Some also suggest removing your period sponge after 3 or 4 hours.



Removing the menstrual sponge

Step-by-step instructions in removing a menstrual sponge.

7. Wash your hands.
8. Squat over a toilet or the tile floor, due to the fact that blood may leak out during the process.
9. Insert two fingers into your vagina. Bear down on your pelvic muscles like you're going to the bathroom.

As the sponge moves lower while you bear down, slide your fingers up its sides and gently pinch the sponge (as high up as you can) and pull it out.

How to clean a sponge?

Sea sponge cleaning methods aren't proven fully effective and there is some conflicting information. Before cleaning, thoroughly inspect the sponge for sand or sea debris. Use tweezers or needle-nose pliers to remove any dirt.

Since sponges can only be worn for a few hours and proper cleaning takes time, period sponge devotees usually have multiple sponges on hand.

Here is a general cleaning guide:

10. After pulling the sponge out rinse it thoroughly. Wet the sponge thoroughly in warm water.
11. Soak or boil for several minutes. Add a spoonful of vinegar, hydrogen peroxide, or few drops of tea tree oil and swish it around (optional) and hang to dry.
12. Once the sponge is dry, you can use it again.



What is Contraception?

Contraception, also known as birth control, is how you prevent pregnancy. If you're sexually active and don't want a baby, use birth control.

How does birth control work?

Birth control methods may work in a number of different ways:

- Preventing sperm from getting to the eggs. Types include condoms, diaphragms, cervical caps, and contraceptive sponges.
- Keeping the ovaries from releasing eggs that could be fertilized. Types include birth control pills, patches, shots, vaginal rings, and emergency contraceptive pills. IUDs, devices which are implanted into the uterus.
- Sterilization, which permanently prevents a someone from getting pregnant or from from being able to get someone else pregnant.

Birth control and period

Birth control methods such as the pill, patch, vaginal ring, shot and IUD can all impact menstrual bleeding. Some birth control methods can increase bleeding, and some can decrease it.

Hormonal contraceptives are also helpful in treating certain gynecological disorders that cause painful periods and heavy bleeding, such as:

- Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS).
A hormone disorder in which the ovaries fail to regularly release eggs. This causes cysts to develop on the ovaries. Hormonal birth control reduces the level of androgen, a male hormone, that causes PCOS.
- Endometriosis.
A disease in which tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows outside the uterus. This can cause severe menstrual cramps and heavy menstrual periods among other

symptoms. Hormonal contraceptives stop the ovaries from over-producing estrogen, which slows the growth of endometrial tissue. Periods are lighter, more regular and shorter.

What kind of birth control method is best?

By learning more about birth control options, you can decide which method is best for you and your partner. Consider the following factors:

- Ease of use or comfort level using the method.
- Effectiveness at preventing pregnancy.
- Protection against sexually transmitted infections.
- Your age and overall health.
- Plans for pregnancy.
- Side effects or risks.
- How frequently you have sex or how many partners you have.
- Privacy.
- Other benefits like lighter periods or more predictable menstrual cycles



Birth Control Methods

Women can choose from many different types of birth control methods. There is no „best” method of birth control for every person. The birth control method that is right for you and your partner depends on many things, and may change over time.

Here are some of the options:

1. Condoms

The condom is the only form of contraception that protects against most STIs as well as preventing pregnancy. This method of contraception can be used on demand, is hormone free and can easily be carried with you and it comes in male and female varieties.

Male condoms are rolled onto an erect penis and act as a physical barrier, preventing sexual fluids from passing between people during sex.

The female condom is placed into the vagina right before sex. Based on typical use, the female

condom is not quite as effective as the male latex condom and it may take a little practice to get used to.

Pros include:

- It's the best protection against STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections)
- Can be used on demand
- Hormone free

Cons include:

- It can tear or come off during sex if not used properly
- Some people are allergic to latex condoms

2. The Oral Contraceptive Pill

It's the little tablet taken once a day. The oral contraceptive pill is one of the most common methods of contraception used by women.

There are a few different types of pill to choose from, so it's about finding the one that's right for you.

The combined pill contains estrogen and progestin and mini pill contains only one hormone, a progestin. The pill can have many benefits, however remembering to take it on time is a must.

Pros include:

- Highly effective when used correctly
- Permits sexual spontaneity and doesn't interrupt sex
- Some pills may even reduce heavy and painful periods and may have a positive effect on acne

Cons include:

- Forgetting to take your pill means it won't be as effective
- It can only be used by women
- It is not suitable for women who can't take oestrogen-containing contraception
- It does not protect against STIs.

The pill is only available by getting a prescription from a medical professional so visit your local doctor or sexual health clinic.



3. The Contraceptive Injection

The contraceptive injection (Depo-Provera, Sayana Press or Noristerat) releases the hormone progesterone into your bloodstream to prevent pregnancy.

The contraceptive injection steadily releases the hormone progesterone into your bloodstream, which prevents the release of an egg each month (ovulation).

It also thickens the cervical mucus, which makes it difficult for sperm to move through the cervix, and thins the lining of the womb so a fertilised egg is less likely to implant itself.

You usually have the Depo-Provera and Noristerat injections in your bottom, but you can have them in your upper arm.

You can have the Sayana Press injection in your tummy (abdomen) or thigh and would normally learn to do this yourself.

Pros include:

- Each injection lasts for either 8 or 13 weeks
- It's an option if you can't use oestrogen-based contraception
- It's safe to use while you're breastfeeding
- It's not affected by other medicines
- It may reduce heavy, painful periods and help with premenstrual symptoms for some women

Cons include:

- Your periods may change and become irregular, heavier, shorter, lighter or stop altogether. This can carry on for some months after you stop the injections.
- It does not protect against STIs
- A delay of up to 1 year may occur before menstruation gets normal again and pregnancy is possible.

4. Intrauterine Device (IUD)

This small, T-shaped device is made from material containing progesterone hormone or plastic and copper and is fitted inside a person's uterus by a trained healthcare provider. It's a long-acting and reversible method of contraception, which can stay in place for 3 to 10 years.

Some IUDs contain hormones that are gradually released to prevent pregnancy. The IUD can also be an effective emergency contraception if fitted by a healthcare professional within five days (120 hours) of having unprotected sex.

IUDs containing coppers are 99% effective and the ones containing hormones are 99.8% effective.

Cons include:

- Irregular bleeding/spotting occurs in the first 6 months of use
- Requires a trained healthcare provider for insertion and removal
- Does not protect against STIs.



5. The Contraceptive Implant

In this method, a small, flexible rod is placed under the skin in a person's upper arm, releasing a form of the hormone progesterone. The hormone stops the ovary releasing the egg and thickens the cervical mucus making it difficult for sperm to enter the womb.

The implant requires a small procedure using local anesthetic to fit and remove the rod and needs to be replaced after three years.

Pros include:

- Highly effective
- Is a long-lasting
- Implant is a reversible contraceptive option

Cons include:

- Requires a trained healthcare provider for insertion and removal
- Sometimes there can be irregular bleeding initially
- Does not protect against STIs

6. The Contraceptive Patch

The patch releases a daily dose of hormones through the skin into the bloodstream to prevent pregnancy.

It contains the same hormones as the combined pill – oestrogen and progestogen – and works in the same way by preventing the release of an egg each month (ovulation).

It also thickens cervical mucus, which makes it more difficult for sperm to move through the cervix, and thins the womb lining so a fertilised egg is less likely to be able to implant itself.

7. The Vaginal Ring

The vaginal ring is a small soft, plastic ring that you place inside your vagina.

It releases a continuous dose of the hormones oestrogen and progestogen into the bloodstream, which prevents the release of an egg each month.

It also thickens the cervical mucus, which makes it more difficult for sperm to move through the cervix, and thins the lining of the womb so a fertilised egg is less likely to implant itself.

The standard way to use the ring is you leave it in for 21 days, then remove it and have a 7-day ring-free break. You're protected against pregnancy during the ring-free break. After the 7-day break you then put a new ring in for another 21 days.

You can also choose to have a shorter ring-free break or not to have a break at all. This is as safe and effective as the standard use.



Recommended Food

Many people have uncomfortable symptoms during or before menstruation. Some foods can lessen these symptoms, while other foods can make them worse.

In addition to supporting your hormones with a balanced diet of adequate protein, carbohydrates, and fats during your menstrual phase, it is important to focus on foods high in magnesium, iron and vitamin B6.

Recent studies determined the positive effect of magnesium and vitamin B6 in reducing the severity of PMS. If you often experience premenstrual syndrome it may be worth focusing on providing your body with these nutrients.

Another studies have also shown that a vegetarian diet positively affects menstruation. The incidence of menstrual irregularity is higher among nonvegetarians.

Vegetarians consume significantly greater amounts of polyunsaturated fatty acids, carbohydrates,

vitamin B-6, and dietary fiber whereas the nonvegetarians report greater intakes of saturated fatty acids, protein, cholesterol, caffeine and alcohol.

What specific products are beneficial for menstruation?

When you lose a lot of blood during your period, you may end up losing more red blood cells than your body can make. Heavy menstrual bleeding can make you more susceptible to iron deficiency anemia.

Selected foods rich in iron:

1. Dark green leafy vegetables, such as:
 - amaranth leaves
 - parsley
 - radish leaves
 - drumstick leaves
2. Dried fruit, such as:
 - dates
 - raisins (black)
 - dried apricot

3. Seeds, such as:
 - sesame
 - garden cress
 - sunflower

As previously mentioned vitamin B6 can help to relieve symptoms of PMS, including relieving menstrual pain. Because vitamin B6 deficiency is not common, patients should consult with a healthcare provider before starting a supplement.

Selected foods rich in vitamin B6:

4. Fish
5. Beef
6. Nuts, such as:
 - pistachio
 - walnuts
 - hazelnuts
7. Eggs
8. Milk and dairy products

If your diet excludes animal products, there are also plenty of fortified vegan and vegetarian products on the market that are rich in vitamin B6.



9. Water

Drinking a lot of water is always important, and this is especially true during your period.

Staying hydrated can reduce your chances of getting dehydration headaches, a common symptom of menstruation. Drinking plenty of water can also stop you from retaining water and bloating.

What products should be avoided during menstruation?

10. Salt

Try to avoid fried foods, fast food and readymade snacks, including packaged foods, as they are rich in salt and sodium.

Consumption of excess salt causes water retention that leads to bloating during your period.

11. Spicy food

Avoid also spicy food since it can upset your stomach and cause acid refluxes.

12. Alcohol

Alcohol has numerous effects on the body ranging from a bad hangover to headaches.



Practical Advice on Period Symptoms

It is normal to experience some degree of discomfort in the days leading up to your period and for the first day or two of bleeding, although some women have no discomfort. For most women, these symptoms, while annoying, are easily managed and do not interfere with day-to-day living.

1. Period Cramps

Menstrual cramps can be really uncomfortable and painful, but they do happen for a reason.

During your period, your uterus contracts — meaning it squeezes or cramps up. This makes the lining come off the walls of your uterus and leave your body. When your uterus cramps up, it's helping the period blood flow out of your vagina.

In most cases period pain is mild enough to treat at home. Less commonly, period pain can be caused by an underlying medical condition, such as endometriosis, fibroids, adenomyosis or pelvic inflammatory disease.

Effective methods to fight period pain:

1.1. Painkillers.

You can take ibuprofen and aspirin to help manage your pain. However, do not take ibuprofen or aspirin if you have asthma or stomach, kidney or liver problems. Aspirin should not be taken by anyone under 16 years of age. It should be taken into account that aspirin has blood-thinning properties, which can affect bleeding.

You could also try paracetamol, but studies have shown that it does not reduce pain as well as ibuprofen or aspirin.

If ordinary painkillers do not help, your doctor may prescribe a stronger painkiller, such as naproxen or codeine.

You could also try:

1.2. Stopping smoking.

Smoking is thought to increase the risk of period pain.

1.3. Exercise.

You may not feel like exercising during a painful period, but being active may reduce pain. Try some gentle swimming, walking or cycling. Relaxation activities, such as yoga or Pilates, can also help distract from pain and discomfort.

1.4. Heat.

Putting a heat pad or hot water bottle (wrapped in a towel) on your stomach may help reduce pain. Warm bath or shower can also help you relieve pain and relax.

1.5. Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS).

A small battery-operated device that delivers a mild electrical current to your tummy to help reduce pain.

Of course, not every technique listed above will work for everyone. It may turn out that other techniques will be more helpful for you.



For example, some people claim that a light, circular massage around lower abdomen may also help reduce pain. It is worth trying out what works best for you.

2. Bloating

Bloating before and during a period may result from changes in levels of hormones such as progesterone and estrogen.

Effective methods to fight period bloating:

2.1. Water.

It might seem odd that you need to drink more water when you are feeling the most bloated, but the more water, the better. Not drinking enough water can lead to dehydration, which can cause constipation that leads to bloating.

There's no specific recommendation of how much water each unique person should drink but a common guideline is to drink eight to ten glasses of water throughout the day.

If you're on-the-go, be sure to carry a water bottle with you and try to fill it up several times throughout the day.

2.2. Healthy Foods.

If you're looking for information on what specific foods to eat during menstruation, you can find it in the previous chapter (→ 🍷 **Menstrual Diet**).

Try reaching for healthier snacks, such as fruits and vegetables or other low-sodium foods that won't cause bloating. Avoid processed foods as they can contain high amounts of salt and contribute to increased bloating.

Other safe bets for healthy eating are proteins like fish and chicken and healthy fats, like nuts and avocados. If you want to eat something sweet, consider dark chocolate – it's a good source of magnesium, which can help regulate serotonin and elevate your mood.

2.3. Avoid Caffeine

Caffeine can irritate your stomach and give you that achy, crampy, bloated feeling, so it's best to limit your intake on your period.

In addition to caffeine, it's a good idea to avoid sweet and carbonated drinks that can also increase bloating.

A good option for a drink that doesn't contain caffeine is herbal tea. Drink a cup of hot tea (for example ginger, green tea, peppermint, chamomile, raspberry leaf) to reduce bloating and feel better on your period.

2.3. Exercise

Doing light exercise during your period can also help increase blood flow, which can help relieve period symptoms such as bloating.



3. Fatigue

Feeling tired and listless can sometimes make your daily routine challenging. Heavy menstrual bleeding often causes women to feel tired, commonly known as period fatigue.

This is normal due to the decrease in oestrogen levels, which occurs around this point in your menstrual cycle. Your energy levels will usually return to normal within a few days as your hormone levels begin to increase again.

Fatigue is also one of the most common PMS symptoms. In most cases, feeling tired before your period is nothing to be worried about.

However, severe tiredness accompanied by other symptoms and certain emotions could be a sign of *premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)* (→ ♀ **Period Process**), that often requires treatment.

Effective methods to fight period fatigue:

3.1. Sleep

Period fatigue is real and it can be further impacted by period pain. If you're feeling tired during your period, getting good rest can help your body and mind repair. Aim to get at least 8 hours of sleep a night, especially while on your period.

3.2. Workout.

A moderate amount of aerobic exercise can help boost your energy levels, improve concentration, and ease most PMS symptoms. Try not to exercise within a couple of hours of your bedtime as that may make it harder to fall asleep.

3.3. Consider the Pill

In severe cases, birth control pills and hormone treatment are often used to reduce the discomfort of menstruation. As always, talk to your doctor about what is best for you and your body.



How to Track Your Period?

Tracking your period can be very useful for you. Not only does it help you get to know your body and your cycle better, but it is also important information when visiting your gynecologist or when you are trying to get pregnant.

Why you should track your period?

Keeping a menstrual calendar helps, first and foremost, to determine the length of your cycle, predict when your next period will start, determine your fertile days or estimate when PMS may await you.

It also helps with noticing new and worrying symptoms that might need to be checked by a doctor. Almost always when visiting a gynecologist you will be asked the date of your last period.

It also can help you see patterns in mood changes. Being in tune with your body and understanding the different hormones involved in menstruation can

help you navigate your monthly cycle better.

If you are sexually active but don't want to get pregnant tracking your period can help you with this.

By noting the dates of your period, it will be easier for you to know on which days you have the highest risk of getting pregnant.

It can also be beneficial in the opposite situation, when you are planning a pregnancy. A menstrual calendar will help you figure out when you have the best chance of this happening.

These are just a few benefits of keeping a track on your period.

Where do I track my period?

There are many different methods to choose from when tracking your period, it can be difficult to know where to start if you've never done it before.

Nowadays you can do it traditionally or digitally.

Here are the most popular tracking methods:

- Calendar.
Record information about your cycle in a calendar. This can also be a calendar on your phone or computer.
- App.
Nowadays there are a lot of apps on the market that track your cycle for you. All you have to do is make sure to note down the beginning date of your period every month and the app itself counts your fertile days and predicts when your next period will be. Some apps also send you notifications a few days before the predicted start of bleeding.

The most important thing, however, is to be systematic. Tracking your cycle for one month will not give you enough information to be able to conclude anything from it. It is best to keep track of your period for at least a few months to be able to determine its duration



or certain regularities that accompany your period. However, it is best to keep a menstrual calendar at all times. Only then will you have a full view of what is happening to our cycle and body.

What should I primarily note on my calendar?

The basic information to note is the *start date (1.1)* and *end date (1.2)* of your period. This allows you to determine some basic information, such as:

1.3. Fertile days.

You're most fertile at the time of ovulation. You ovulate about 12 to 14 days before the start of your period. Doctors call the part of the cycle around ovulation the fertile window because the chance of pregnancy is highest at this time.

The fertile window is the five days leading up to ovulation, plus the day of ovulation and the day after ovulation — so about seven days in total.

1.4. PMS.

1.5. Length of your cycle.

The number of days between the first day of consecutive periods is the length of your menstrual cycle.

What else to note?

In addition to keeping track of the start and end dates of your period, you can also note other symptoms and when they occur, such as:

2.1. The intensity of the flow.

2.2. Physical symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, cramps and bloating

2.3. Mental symptoms such as mood swings, food cravings or crying spells

2.4. The consistency of vaginal discharge, such as whether it is watery, thick or sticky.



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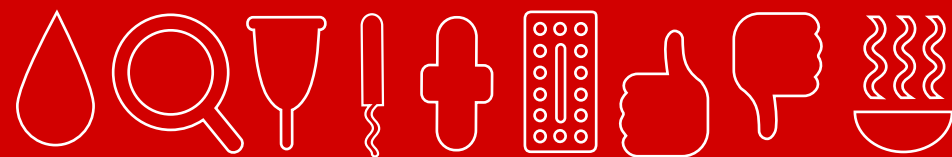
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