

PERIODS

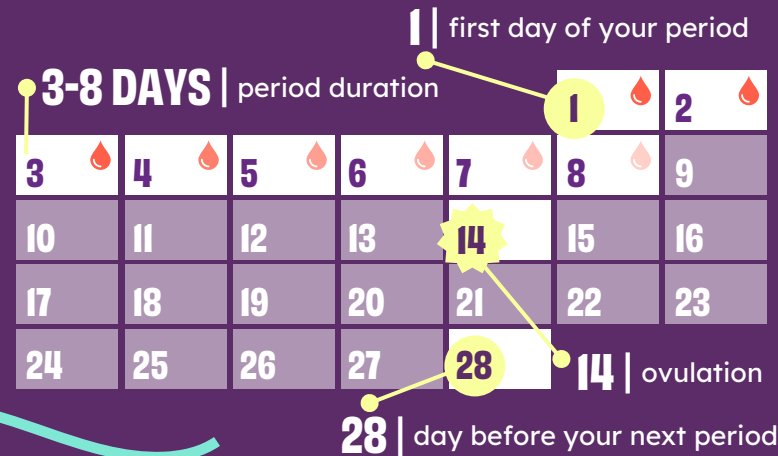
For more information about periods go to:
brook.org.uk/periods



Periods start sometime between the ages of eight and 17. They happen roughly every month and are part of your body preparing for pregnancy.

The ovaries release an egg and the womb lining thickens. If the egg isn't fertilised by sperm, the egg is reabsorbed into the body and the womb lining passes through your vagina. This bleeding is known as a period.

WHAT IS A MENSTRUAL CYCLE?*



BLEEDING: WHAT'S NORMAL?

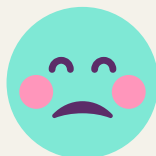
There's no 'normal' period!
But here's a rough guide:

- ▶ Bleeding from your vagina for a few days (commonly 3-8 days)
 - ▶ Passing between 1-5 teaspoons of pink, red or brown blood - this can be thick or watery
- Periods can be irregular,
- ▶ heavy or light and can change throughout your life



COMMON SYMPTOMS

- ▶ Feeling cramps in your lower stomach or back
- ▶ Feeling tense, emotional or irritable before a period (known as PMS)
- ▶ Breast tenderness
- ▶ Spots
- ▶ Upset stomach
- ▶ Tiredness
- ▶ Bloating
- ▶ Headaches



* Remember, all cycles are different, some may be shorter or longer than 28 days and your ovulation date can vary.

TOP TIPS: CRAMPS

- ▶ Take paracetamol or ibuprofen (always follow instructions carefully)
- ▶ Use a hot water bottle on your tummy
- ▶ Take a warm bath
- ▶ Try some gentle exercise



If your periods are so painful or heavy that they make it hard to get on with your day-to-day life, speak to a doctor or nurse.



PERIOD PRODUCT OPTIONS

People generally use a combination of products. Most come in different sizes and to suit different flows (heavy or light). Experiment to find what works best for you.

TAMPONS

Small tubes of soft cotton, inserted into the vagina with applicators or your finger to absorb blood. Shouldn't be kept in for more than eight hours. Don't worry, they can't get stuck or lost! They have a string attached to pull them out with.



PADS

Made of absorbent material to absorb blood. Have a sticky back - and sometimes wings - to keep them in place in your underwear.



REUSABLE PADS

Like normal pads but made of washable cloth.

PERIOD PANTS

Underwear with a built in absorbent layer. You can wash them and reuse.

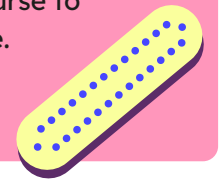
MENSTRUAL CUPS

Small reusable containers made of flexible silicone. Inserted into the vagina to collect blood. You empty the blood, wash it, and reinsert.



DID YOU KNOW?

Some methods of hormonal contraception (like the pill) can make your periods more regular, lighter, heavier, or stop altogether. Speak to a nurse to find out more.



MISSED PERIOD?

If you've had vaginal sex without using contraception (or your method failed) and you have missed a period, this could be a sign that you're pregnant. You should take a pregnancy test at least 21 days after sex without contraception or speak to a doctor or nurse.



TOP TIPS: STAYING HEALTHY

Your body will keep the vagina and vulva clean through natural vaginal secretions (discharge).

- Use plain, unperfumed soap every day to gently wash your vulva.
- Never clean inside the vagina (douche) as it washes out the good bacteria.
- Always wipe front to back, to avoid transferring bacteria from the anus.
- Always try to urinate after sexual activity, to reduce the risk of infections.

Vaginal odour can change at different times of your cycle. If your vulva and vagina are sore, itchy, have an unpleasant smell or unusual discharge, this could be a sign of an infection. If you experience these symptoms or you're bleeding between periods or after sex, go to see a medical professional.

