

Sexuality: About Periods



This factsheet is for parents and carers with a child who has intellectual disability

When should I start discussing periods?

Menstruation or periods can begin between the ages of 8-16 years. It is a good idea to start talking about periods before age 8.

It is never too early or too late to talk about periods and sexuality.

The earlier children learn about bodies the easier it will be to talk about body changes during puberty including periods.

Parents and carers can help their child with an intellectual disability to:

- Understand periods
- Learn the skills necessary to manage periods
- Feel ok about having periods

What information should be included when talking about periods?

Discussion should include information about:

- bodies
- what periods are
- steps in how to manage periods

While everyone is different these guidelines should help:

- Keep language simple
- Give as much information as can be taken in and understood
- Let other carers know what you are doing and saying so they can help
- Use encouragement and praise
- Check instructions are understood before encouraging practice
- If discussing tampons, check information and instructions for help
- Teach ways of keeping track of when the next period is due

Remember it is also important to talk about the possibility of pregnancy once menstruation occurs, and to include discussion about sexuality, puberty and reproduction.

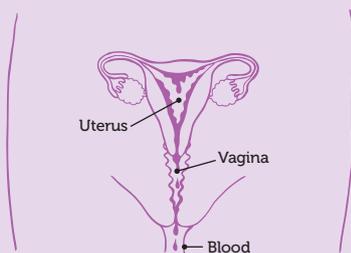
How do I talk about periods?

Information about periods can be presented in clear, practical and simple terms. It is often important to repeat information several times and/or to provide supportive teaching resources like books, pictures, or Apps. The information, or scripts, below can be helpful for adults when discussing periods.

About periods – general information

- Getting periods is a healthy natural part of growing up. Most females start their periods between 8-16 years.
- Most females stop having periods when they are about 50.
- You can tell a trusted adult at home or school when you see blood on your pants for the first time.
- Periods are private. You can talk about them with people you know and trust, but not to just anyone.
- Everybody is different, so everyone's experience of periods is going to be different.

About periods – physical



Blood leaves the uterus and exits through the vagina (between the legs)

A period means that blood comes from inside the body, from the uterus. It comes through an opening between the legs called the vagina.

The blood that comes out is healthy and expected. It doesn't mean you have been hurt.

Other body changes may be happening when you start your period. Breasts get bigger and hair starts to grow under arms around the vagina.

Periods happen about once a month and last 3-7 days.

About period pants



Period pants help stop blood getting on your clothes or bedding. They can be worn at night, or during the day. There are also period swimmers available.

Period pants can be worn for 8-12 hours, but it is important to know that they can leak, or smell if worn for too long. Period pants need to be washed after every use.

During the day a person might use a pad with their period pants in the morning, and take the pad out using just the period pants for the rest of the afternoon.

About tampons



A tampon can be used for periods. It is put inside the vagina. It can take a bit of time to get used to using a tampon.

Tampons should be changed at least 4 times a day. It is not a good idea to use a tampon all night.

Note: Tampons are not recommended for individuals who cannot manage comfortably physically inserting/removing the tampon themselves.

Tampons can be good for swimming, dancing and doing sport.

Everybody is different. It is personal choice whether to use tampons, pads, or period pants.

About pads



Wearing a pad helps stop blood from getting on your clothes.

Pads should be changed around every four hours, or more often if needed (except when sleeping). Check your pad when you go to the toilet to see if it needs to be changed.

Change your pad in a private place. The toilet or bathroom (when the door is closed) are suitable places.

How do I explain about changing a pad or a tampon?

The following is suggested as to what you might say:

1. Take a clean pad or tampon.
2. Wash your hands. Go to the toilet and shut the door. Pull down underpants and sit on the toilet. Check if pad or tampon needs to be changed.
3. Take off used pad or remove tampon. Wrap used pad or tampon in toilet paper and put in bin beside the toilet. Do not put pads or tampons down the toilet.
4. Putting on a new pad or insert a new tampon: Peel strip off pad or unwrap tampon. Stick the pad down onto your underpants or insert tampon onto your vagina.
5. Wipe between your legs with toilet paper, flush the toilet, pull your underpants back up, tidy your clothes.
6. Wash your hands.

What about premenstrual syndrome?

Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) and menstrual pain can occur.

Symptoms could include:

- irritability
- tiredness
- sore breasts
- fluid retention
- cramps
- back pain
- an increase in seizures (for individuals with epilepsy)
- outbreaks of recurrent infections



Gentle exercise and a healthy diet, a hot water bottle/wheat pack, or a warm bath/shower can help ease some PMS symptoms. Medication and natural therapies are available for pain relief. Always consult a health professional if other medications are being used.

Where can I get more help?

Talking about periods can be an easy and comfortable process for some parents and carers. But talking about periods can also be a difficult and emotional process for some parents and carers too. Remember support is available and can be helpful.

True clinics

Help with sexual health care and contraceptive advice. Visit our website for our locations and opening hours.

True education

Access resources, books, websites, and information about puberty, periods and bodies for people with intellectual disability, or parents and carers.

www.true.org.au

