Menstruation

The average age to start periods or menstruation is 12 years, but the range is between 8 and 17 years. Every month, the ovaries release an egg; this is called ovulation. If this egg is not fertilised by a sperm, it is shed through the vagina along with the lining of the womb, and this is what period blood is. A period will usually last for three to eight days.

Most people who get periods have one every four to five weeks. You may like to keep a diary or use an app to track how often you get yours. Some people have regular periods, and can predict exactly when their next period is due. Other people have irregular periods, which mean they cannot predict when their next period is due. If you are worried about your periods, you can speak to a doctor or nurse.

It's quite common for people's periods to be irregular when they first start having them, then for them to become more regular as they get older.

The menstrual cycle

A menstrual cycle starts on the day that you get your period and lasts until the day before you get your next one. The average menstrual cycle is 28 days, but it can be longer or shorter for some people.

When people talk about their period, they are usually referring to the bleeding which is the most visible part of the menstrual cycle, but it's just one stage in a whole process that the body goes through every month in order to prepare for getting pregnant.

Every month, your womb or uterus, which is the space where a foetus/baby develops, builds up its lining in order to prepare for getting pregnant. This lining, mostly made up of blood, is what is shed when your period starts. This is why your periods stop when you become pregnant; the womb lining is used to provide nutrients to the growing foetus, instead.

Ovulation

A woman's ovaries release an egg (sometimes two) around 14 days after the first day of her period, or 10-16 days before the start of her next period. The egg travels down the fallopian tubes, which connect the ovaries to the womb. Once released, the egg lives for around 24 hours. If it is not fertilised, it is shed via a period, along with the womb lining.

Period blood

Period blood can be any colour from pink to red to brown. Sometimes period blood can be quite thick and other times it can be watery. This is all normal and you may notice your blood looks different at the start and end of your period. You may get blood clots, too – these are also perfectly normal and nothing to worry about, unless there's a lot more of them than usual.

When you get a period, it's normal for the bleeding to stop and start. For example, you may bleed for a few hours, and then stop bleeding for a few hours. Or you may stop bleeding all through the night, or all through one day, but then it will start again. Sometimes you'll think it's all over, then there's one final wave. Everyone's period is slightly different!

Sometimes, your period may be lighter than normal – sometimes it may be heavier than usual. Lots of things can affect how light or heavy a period is, so don't worry too much if it changes from cycle to cycle! But if your period is significantly lighter or heavier than usual, for several cycles, you can ask a doctor or nurse for advice. And if you get a lot of pain during your period, make sure to tell a doctor, so you can get help.

The side effects of periods

One of the biggest effects of getting your period is called pre-menstrual syndrome or tension (PMS, PMT). You can start to experience the symptoms of PMS up to two weeks before you start your period. No one knows exactly what causes PMS, but it's thought to be linked to changes in hormone levels caused by the menstrual cycle.

PMS can have different symptoms including: breast pain, stomach upset, diarrhoea or constipation, spots, cramps as well as mood swings, anxiety, irritability, feeling distracted.

Period products

Tampons are small tubes of soft cotton which has been pressed together. They have a string attached to one end so you can pull them out after use. Brook has a film to show you how to use them.

Pads and liners (also known as sanitary towels) are liners made of materials which soak up liquids, which you can use to line your knickers and 'catch' blood as it flows out. Use unscented versions to avoid a reaction. Do not use for swimming.

Menstrual cups are small containers made of a flexible material like rubber or silicone, which – like a tampon – are inserted into the vagina to catch blood and stop it flowing out. Unlike tampons, they are reusable – you just empty the blood out of the cup, wash it, and reinsert it. These may not be convenient to use when you use public toilets.

Period pants are underwear or swimwear with a built-in absorbent layer. They can be washed and reused.

Affordable or free products

The Hygiene Bank is a charity that collects and redistributes donated toiletries, hygiene, beauty, and personal care items to other charities. Donations can be made at any Boots in Newcastle city centre and across the City. Locations in Newcastle:

- Newcastle Civic Centre
- Newcastle City Library
- ASDA Byker
- Abode Living (Estate agents)
- The Barre Workout
- The Wax Bar Desmond
- Grainger Market Weigh House

You may also be able to get these products from **Streetwise** and **Nunsmoor**, **Byker Sands** and **Galafield** community and family hubs.

Useful links

Sexual health article covers sex, contraception, puberty, consent and STIs, as well as, services that can support you in Newcastle.

Sex in later life article covers issues related to the menopause, contraception, consent, STIs and services that can support you in Newcastle.

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Useful Organisations

Byker Sands Family Centre

Email: childrenfamiliesnewcastle-east@newcastle.gov.uk

Website: https://www.facebook.com/Community-Family-Hub-East-1742672322696105/

Telephone: 0191 275 9636

Address: Byker Sands Family Centre, NE6 2FF

Streetwise Young People’s Project – Everyturn Mental Health

Email: admin@streetwisenorth.org.uk

Website: www.streetwisenorth.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 230 5400

Address: Streetwise Everyturn, NE1 4XB

The Galafield Centre

Email: newcastleouterwestenquiries@newcastle.gov.uk

Telephone: 0191 277 7800

Address: Galafield Centre, NE5 1LZ

Nunsmoor Centre

Email: innerwestcfn@newcastle.gov.uk

Website: https://childrenandfamiliesnewcastle.org.uk/welcome-your-family-hub

Telephone: 0191 277 4400

Address: Studley Terrace, NE4 5AH

The Hygiene Bank

Website: https://thehygienebank.com/

Telephone: 0191 277 4400

Asda

Website: https://www.asda.com/

Telephone: 0191 277 4400

Related Articles

Sex in Later Life

Sexual health