

SEXUALITY

About Periods – for parents and carers of girls and women with a learning difficulty or disability



Girls and women with learning difficulties and disabilities get periods. All have different support needs and all can be helped to manage in some way.

How can a parent or carer help?

Parents and carers can help a girl or woman with a learning difficulty or disability to:

- understand what is happening to her body when she has a period
- learn the skills necessary for managing her period (menstrual management)
- feel good about herself and her period

The skills you have used in teaching other self care tasks will be helpful.

When should I start discussing periods?

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

Most girls start menstruating between the ages of nine and sixteen. It is a good idea to start talking about periods before the age of nine.

No matter what the age, it's never too late or too early to talk about periods and sexuality.

What information should be included when talking about periods?

Discussion about periods should include information about:

- bodies
- what periods are
- pads or tampons
- steps in how to manage periods

While everyone is different, these general guidelines should be useful:

- keep the language simple
- give as much information as can be taken in and understood
- let other family members and carers know what you are doing and saying so they can help
- encourage practicing the wearing of pads before periods start
- have a calendar so that she can record when her period is due
- use encouragement and praise

- check the instructions are understood before encouraging practice
- if discussing tampons, check the information and instructions for help

Remember, it is also important to include discussion about sexuality issues when talking about periods and puberty and to talk about the possibility of pregnancy if the woman is sexually active.

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. Consider the following ways of explaining about periods.

About periods – general information

Getting periods is healthy.

It is a natural part of growing up and becoming a woman.

Most girls start having their periods between the ages of nine and sixteen.

Most women stop having periods when they are about 50.

Boys and men don't get periods.

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 (showing a simple diagram might help)

A period means that blood comes from inside a woman's body. It comes through an opening between her legs. This opening is called a vagina.

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

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

You will have a period about once a month. Your period will last for a few days – about three to seven days.

About pads (show a pad to help explain)

Wearing a pad stops the blood from getting on your clothes.

Pads should be changed every two to four hours or more often if necessary. 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, bathroom and bedroom are private places when the door is closed.

About tampons (show a tampon to help explain)

A tampon can be used for periods. It is put inside the vagina.

Tampons should be changed at least four times a day.

Some girls and women may take a bit of time to get used to tampons. They can be good when swimming, dancing or playing sport.

At night while you are sleeping you might want to wear a pad.

Everybody is different, some girls and women prefer to use pads and others might prefer to use tampons.

Tampons are not recommended for women who cannot comfortably or physically manage their own menstrual self care.



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How do I explain about changing a pad or tampon?

When explaining how to change a pad or tampon, break the information down into easy steps. Focus on one point at a time. Remember to be practical and clear.

The following is a suggested list of what you might say:

Take a clean pad or tampon from drawer, or bag if away from home.

1. Wash your hands.

Go to the toilet and close the door. Pull down underpants and sit on the toilet.

Check if the pad or tampon being worn needs to be changed.

2. Take off your used pad or remove tampon.

Wipe between legs with toilet paper.

3. Wrap the used pad or tampon in toilet paper, or put in a paper or plastic bag.

4. Put on a new pad or insert a new tampon.

Peel off strip off new pad or unwrap tampon.

Stick the pad down on your underpants or insert tampon into your vagina.

Pull your underpants back up. Tidy your clothes.

5. Put the used pad or tampon into a bin.

Do not put pads in the toilet.

Flush the toilet.

6. Wash your hands.

You may need to explain about the need to change underpants, if they have blood on them and incorporate this in your information.

What about premenstrual syndrome?

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and menstrual pain can happen to any woman.

Symptoms can include:

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

Gentle exercise and healthy diet, a hot water bottle or warm bath 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.



NOTES

Where can I get more help?

For some parents and carers talking about periods can be an easy and comfortable process. For some parents and carers talking about periods is a difficult and emotional process. Remember getting support can be helpful. Support is available to help parents and carers of girls and women who may need education and behavioural support.

For more information about Family Planning Queensland (FPQ) services or menstrual management, contact FPQ Education or visit www.fpq.com.au for reference to FPQ's brochure, About Periods.

FPQ clinics can also help with sexual health care and contraceptive advice.

Note: this fact sheet has been developed for parents and carers of people with learning difficulties. Publications are most effective when used as part of a comprehensive sexuality education program.

Disclaimer

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