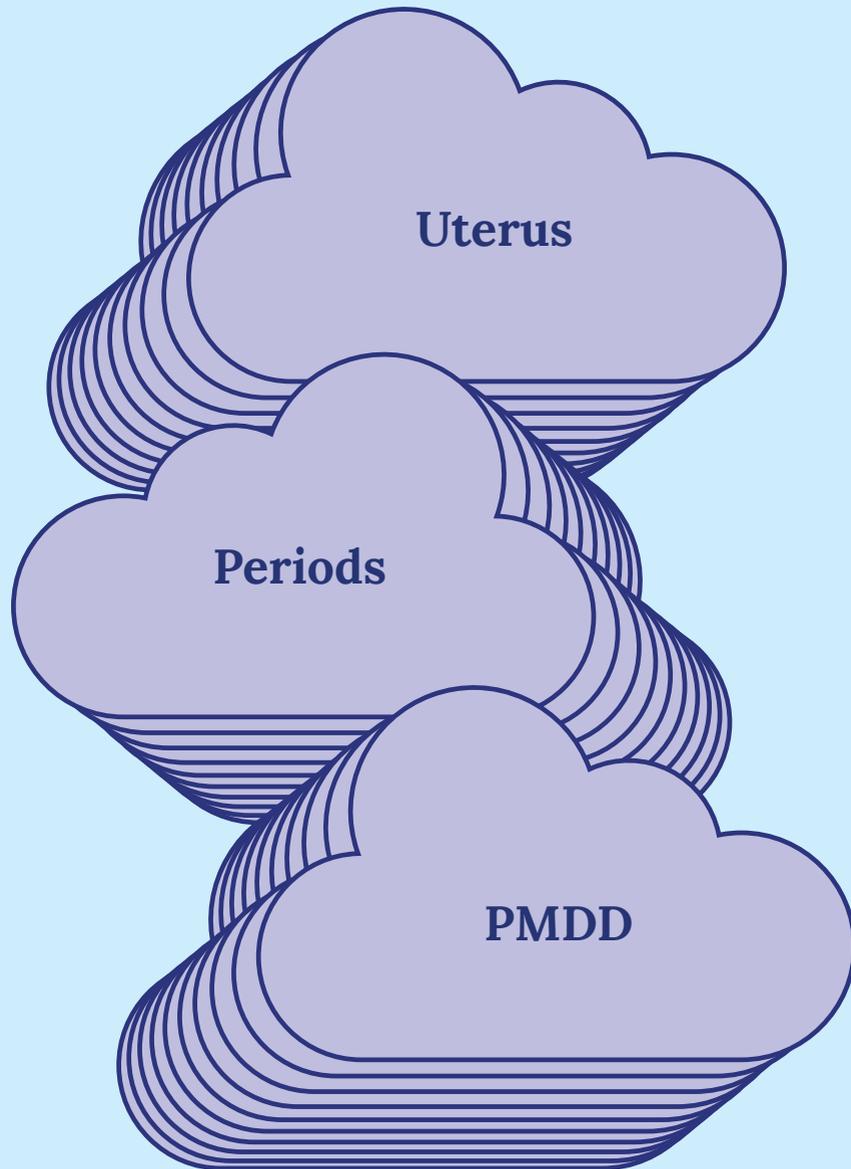


Know Your Period

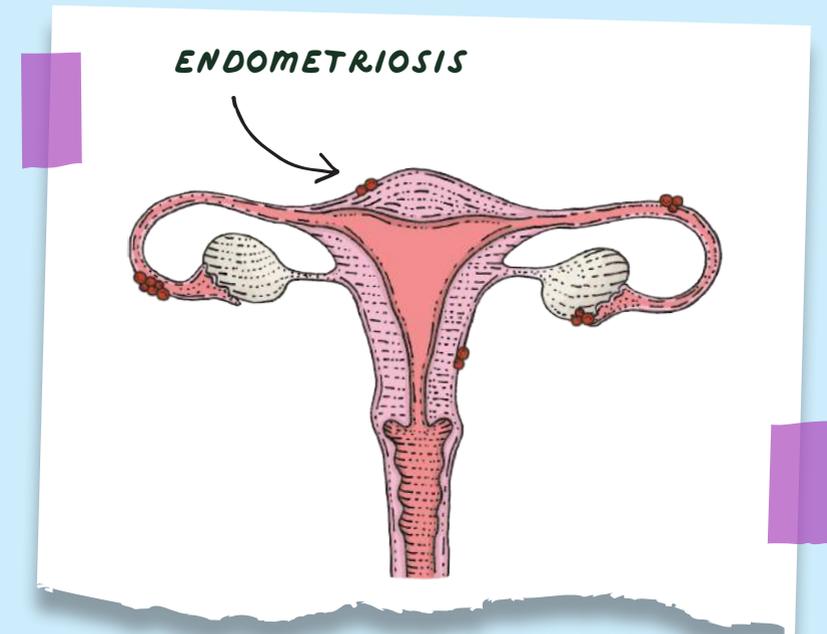
This topic is a continuation from Level 1 - Know your Period



Endometriosis and PCOS

What is endometriosis?

You might have heard of a well known illness known as endometriosis, which is an example of uterus-related illness! This is when the uterine tissue grows outside the uterus. Although there are theories, nobody knows exactly why this happens. It scars tissues and can cause excruciating pain when menstruating or going to the bathroom because of many different reasons. Endometriosis can happen at any age and can affect your everyday life and your activities. You can have mild to severe back pains and it may affect your fertility as well.



What is polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS)?

PCOS is a common hormonal disorder; one in five women are affected by it. The main symptoms are irregular or absent periods, increase in male hormones (which can be detected in a blood test) that lead to excess body hair or acne, and polycystic ovaries. PCOS can differ from person to person; however, environmental and genetic factors can affect and effect people's lives if they wish to conceive. Although PCOS has no cure, there are ways to alleviate some of the symptoms. If someone wishes to become pregnant, a change of lifestyle is best through the following:

Relaxation

Stress can exacerbate PCOS symptoms. Find ways of managing stress.

Sleep

Lack of sleep can increase your stress levels and give you cravings.

Improving diet and exercising

It is one of the most effective ways to help alleviate PCOS symptoms by increasing chances for a healthy pregnancy, improving acne, and reducing risk of diabetes and heart disease. This can also be good for a healthy mind. Find an exercise you can stick to but don't over push yourself.

MY MOM'S FRIEND HAS PCOS! SHE SAID THAT HER PERIOD DIDN'T COME FOR A YEAR WHEN SHE WAS 20! SO SHE WENT TO THE DOCTOR WHO DIAGNOSED HER. - B.



Reproductive Tract Infections

Types of reproductive tract infections:

Urinary Tract Infections

(UTIs) are often caused by E. coli bacteria, which usually enter the urethra from the rectum. Symptoms include burning sensation or pain when urinating, blood mixed in urine, no vaginal discharge and not being able to urinate despite the urge.

Thrush

A common fungal infection that occurs when there is an overgrowth of the fungus (or yeast) called Candida, causing the change in the vaginal pH or hormone levels. Symptoms can include genital itching and/or burning, with watery, white and lumpy vaginal discharge.

Bacterial Vaginosis

The inflammation of the vagina and infection of the vulva which can affect people of all age, resulting from urinary tract infection (UTI), irritations, and allergic reactions to the chemical residues on sanitary products. Symptoms include unusual vaginal discharge, itching and burning pain.

Vaginitis

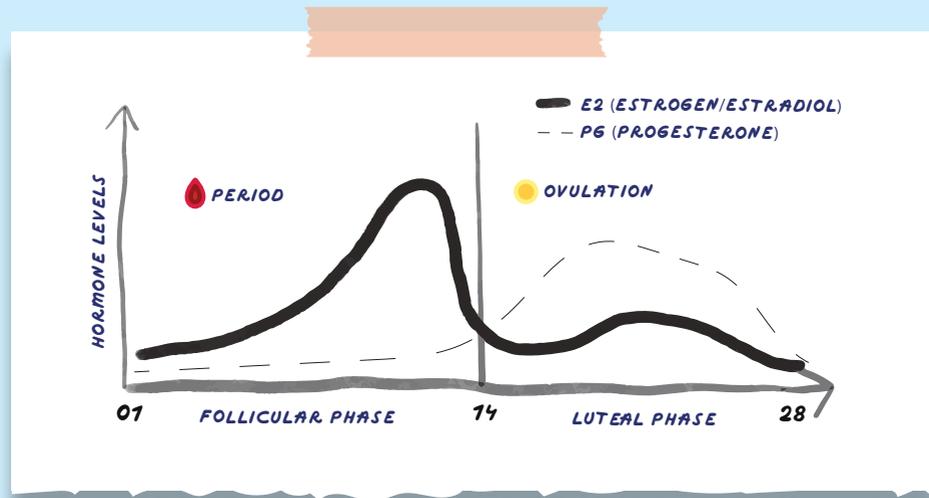
The inflammation of the vagina and infection of the vulva resulting from a urinary tract infection (UTI), irritations, and allergic reactions to the chemical residues on sanitary products. Symptoms include unusual vaginal discharge, itching and burning pain.

I'VE HAD THIS ONCE - MAKE SURE TO GO TO THE DOCTOR! - A.

The Menstrual Phases

Follicular, ovulation, and luteal phases

The menstrual cycle is the direct communication between your brain and your body, which happens through hormones influencing your brain. Hormones are what cause us to grow, go through puberty, and have periods!



How long is it?

The menstrual cycle is different from your actual period. The length of the menstrual cycle is the number of days counted from the first day of your period (when you are bleeding) up to and including the day before the start of your next period.

Day 1 is the first day of your menstrual cycle and **day 28 (up to 35)** is the last day of your cycle.

For example, if your period starts on the **6th of March** and your next period starts on the **3rd of April**, then your menstrual cycle is about **28 days long**. If you have a short

cycle length, you might get your period twice in a month. For the first few years after menstruation begins, having a long cycle is common. However, menstrual cycles tend to shorten and become more regular as you age.

Follicular phase

This starts on the first day of your period. During this time, Follicle-Stimulating Hormone (FSH) is secreted, stimulating follicle production in the ovaries which contain eggs. But **what is a follicle?** It's a cell which generates hormones. Basically ovaries contain lots of cells, and one cell gets chosen randomly to mature during each cycle. It can then potentially become fertilised (which would make you pregnant). During this time, the FSH gradually increases the production of estrogen in order to make both your vaginal discharge and the lining of your uterus thin so that sperm can swim through the uterus.

Ovulatory phase

YOU HAVE PROBABLY HEARD PEOPLE SAYING THEY'RE 'OVULATING' - M.

LH (Luteinizing Hormone) increases during this phase and releases an egg from the ovaries into the fallopian tubes for fertilisation and pregnancy. This is the 'hot' time of the month when you are extra fertile and your body temperature is higher.

Luteal phase

The luteal phase is the second half of the cycle. If you don't get pregnant after ovulation, the empty follicle releases hormones (estrogen and progesterone) to thicken the lining of the uterus to prepare for a possible future pregnancy! After this, the cycle starts again where the uterus lining is shed and you start bleeding!

What is defined as an "irregular" cycle?

An irregular cycle is when you detect a significant change to your usual period cycle. You might feel anxious when you experience a lack of period, but this in no way defines your femininity or womanhood.

Irregularities can be caused by different reasons such as extreme weight-loss or excessive exercising, PCOS or other uterine conditions, and some types of medication. Thyroid problems can also mess with your hormone production and make your periods very light, heavy, or irregular. An irregular cycle every now and then is quite common and can be harmless, but make sure to track your period to check if the irregularities continue. Consult your doctor and health care provider if you are worried about your cycle.

Amenorrhea in high level athletes

The lack or interruption of periods within high level athletes is a common phenomenon due to a pause in the secretion of hormones due to an important amount of stress in the body and/or a lack of calorie intake (especially a decrease of body fat). If you are an athlete undergoing this issue, reducing the amount of sport activity or increasing your calorie intake, specifically consuming enough healthy fats can help. You can also substitute a day in a week of intense sport activity with a milder activity such as yoga.

IRREGULAR PERIODS CAN BE STRESSFUL. VISIT THE DOCTOR IF YOU ARE WORRIED! - A.

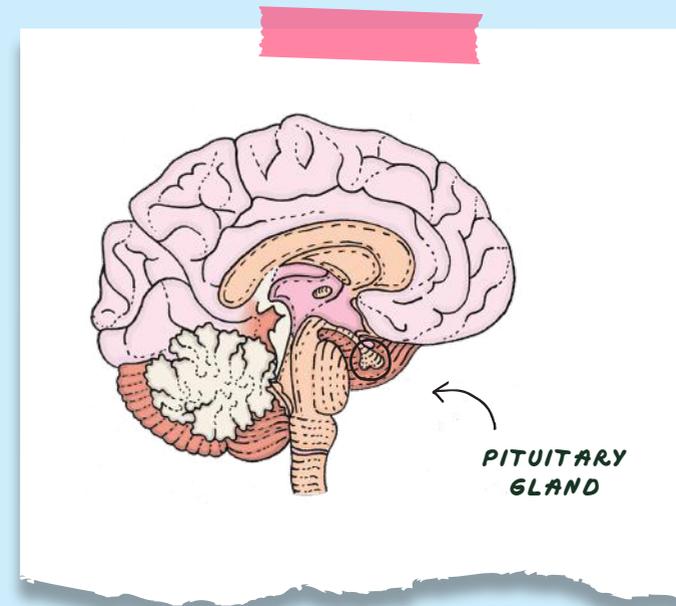


What is the pituitary gland?

The pituitary gland is a very important gland which is located at the base of your brain. It is small, roundish and pea-shaped. It is responsible for a lot of things as it creates the chemicals which we call 'hormones', hence its nickname of the 'master gland'. These chemicals are what cause us to grow, go through puberty, have periods! It is safe to say that without this gland, this book wouldn't even exist!

How does the pituitary gland affect my periods?

Once you have reached a certain age, the pituitary gland will start secreting the LH hormone every month. This hormone causes ovulation, which is when your ovaries release an egg cell which finds its way into the uterus through the fallopian tube.



Emotions During Periods



What is PMDD?

PMDD (premenstrual dysphoric disorder) manifests as severe premenstrual symptoms which affect your everyday life and interfere with your activities. You can feel depressed, anxious, angry, tired, extremely irritable, and suicidal. You might also have very low self-esteem and intense conflicts with your loved ones. PMDD happens because you are more sensitive to the hormonal fluctuations. PMDD is more common in people with mental illnesses. If you have PMDD, make sure to track your emotions and behaviour during your menstrual cycle. Understanding your emotions and habits during the darkest moments of your PMDD can help you control your behaviour during the next cycle. If you feel overwhelmed, please consult your doctor or therapist.

Although PMDD and PMS affect your hormones and mood, it is important for you to take responsibility of your actions by finding ways to alleviate the stress without hurting your loved ones. PMS related stress adds a layer of negativity if you're already anxious. Tracking your mood can help recognise these signs. Remember that your stress is always genuine. "It's just your PMS talking" dismisses your emotions. Although hormonal imbalance during PMDD or PMS worsens your negative emotions, they still come from somewhere.



"I fight with my friends and family when I am on my period. What should I do?"

Identify the root of your issue to understand why you feel so negative in the first place.

Take some time to care for yourself, drink tea and other hot drinks, take baths, go for walks, eat foods that you love (and are relatively healthy), and take a breath of fresh air.

Don't isolate yourself and talk to someone you trust about what's bothering you; don't be afraid to ask for their support.

Do not repress and ignore bad thoughts or issues you have, as they may worsen during PMS and your anger could become more severe.

Grow from your mistakes. We all make mistakes, the most important part is learning from them.

Apologise to your loved ones if you have wronged them and take responsibility if you've made mistakes.



DEAR BIG SISTERS

Growing up with PCOS and being prescribed hormone pills that have such adverse effects on the body- pretty distributing growing up. I've always been into sports and doing stuff outside, with PCOS I used to get down 3-5 times a year but I used to bleed continuously for 28-30 days. It used to be heavy and as a result very restricting because my games/ activities used to take a hold because of my cramps. Cramps are horrid- there's diarrhoea, intense cramps that make you faint. I remember I had a tournament and I'd gone to play and on my way back in an auto I fainted because I was in immense amounts of pain. This continues till date. It's so constraining - I've to take a half day from work just to deal with cramps. I've to take care, exercise and eat stuff keeping in mind that certain things will trigger PCOS while some will help it. It's been a completed life style change too. Growing up with this was great in a way that people around me, my brothers, dad, friends, etc have grown to be so much more understanding now that they've seen me like this. There's been no disgust or judgements or awkwardness with them and how they treat other people menstruating around them. And this is a big thing.

**SUBMISSION BY
DEEPITA 24 INDIA**

DEAR BIG SISTERS,

My name is Nandar aka Nandu Gyawali. I grew up in a small village in Northern Shan State, Myanmar. I was raised in intercultural communities but my family was very strict about Nepali cultural practices and made me follow each and every one of them from fasting for religious reasons to banning me from home during the period. Initially, I did follow all the rules given to me during menstruation from not touching anything in the household to not going to temples. I think I did it out of fear, fear of not belonging to my family or ethnic group. Gradually, after receiving quality education out of the country, I realized menstruation is not disgusting or shameful as I was told. In fact, it is the most healthy and pure thing that happened to your body every month. That's when I give up the art of trying to belong to a culture where women's bodies are attached with shame and where women are made to feel something is wrong with their bodies because they bleed. Now, I do not follow any of the rules regarding menstruation practices in my family and they are more accepted towards my choice since I made it very clear about why I don't respect that. Imagine a world without the period, none of us would exist. We exist because of the uterus, that's the whole point.

**SUBMISSION BY
NANDAR 25 MYANMAR**

Gender and Menstruation



Menstruation is a biological function and should not be used as an indication of gender, femininity, or womanhood.

While the language used in this book is quite gendered, it is done so to make our book more accessible to people who are not familiar with the evolving language surrounding gender.

Sex and gender

While the terms are used interchangeably, sex and gender are two different things:

Sex is biological and is assigned when a child is born. So your sex is either male, female, or intersex (neither male or female). These are determined by physical attributes like hormones, chromosomes, or anatomy (penis or vulva).

Gender is the performance of roles, behaviours, activities, attributes, and opportunities associated with a sex - male, female, or intersex.

Gender identity is what we as a person identify as: male, female, non-binary. This is not assigned at birth but relies more on how we feel in our head and heart, what we feel comfortable with, and our behaviour.

Non-binary is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity is not defined in terms of traditional binary opposition like male and female.

Some people's gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth (cisgender), and some other people's gender identity is different from their sex.

Transgender is a person whose sense of personal identity and gender is different from the sex assigned at birth. E.g. a trans woman is someone who was assigned as male at birth but identifies as a woman or has transitioned into a female.

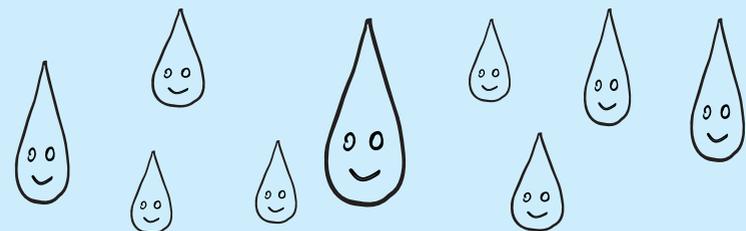
Trans women **do not menstruate** as they do not have a uterus. Also some women who have a uterus, also don't menstruate due to factors like menopause, stress, hysterectomy, or underlying medical conditions. But this does not define them as 'lesser' women. Some women and trans women have to fight to justify themselves as female to others due to not menstruating. **Menstruation doesn't define the essence of a woman.**



A trans man is a man who was assigned female at birth. Since trans men are born with a uterus, many will experience menstruation during their lifetime. This can be distressing due to dysphoria and lack of sanitary bins in men's bathrooms, which makes it hard to dispose of sanitary products. Trans men will usually see their periods stop after a few months on hormone therapy, though this can vary and they can come back if the testosterone dosage is changed.

Menstruation can be a tricky subject to navigate as a trans or non-binary person or someone struggling with gender dysphoria. Menstruation is not a 'woman's thing' - it is a biological function and should not be used as an indication of gender, femininity, or womanhood.

YOU SHOULD TREAT EVERYONE WITH RESPECT
AND KINDNESS - WE ARE ALL JUST HUMAN. - S.



DEAR BIG SISTERS

I'm lucky that compared to other people I don't seem to struggle with the same level of debilitating dysphoria. I experience a fair amount of distress and stress around my chest but having a vagina doesn't bother me as much. I remember as a teen feeling a huge amount of anger and horror at having a period, it made me feel so disgusted at myself and desperately wish I was a guy, but I don't know if this had anything to do with my internal sense of gender, it might have been just the fact of periods and the unfairness of it and general societal shame.

I remember vividly what lengths we would go to in the girls' bathroom to hide the fact that we were on our period (especially the sounds of sanitary products). It was such a shock when a close friend would mention being on her period, I would feel horrified. Just further proof of the primacy of men in our society, that periods are automatically shameful and seen as 'gross'.

Since my teens however I've been more at peace with them, which is helped by the fact that my pain is mild and I use a mooncup, which helps me to forget I even have a period, not to mention the fact that it saves me from monthly purchases of menstrual products with feminine packaging and the dysphoria that publicly buying these products would bring.

Menstrual cups seem to generally have much more gender neutral packaging. I hate talking about periods still, because now it feels to me like it is a "woman's" subject of conversation, though recently it has felt more and more neutral to me; I am grateful to online activists who do work around de-gendering products.

**SUBMISSION BY
FLORENCE LOW, NON-BINARY
TRANSMASCULINE PERSON**



DEAR BIG SISTERS

Menstruation quickly became a topic which I try to talk about as little as possible with the exception of my very close friends.

With my mother, when we come to talk about this topic, I almost automatically shut down. It is something which I dread, I sometimes have nightmares about it even when I am not on my period.

Even if the pains are really strong and I don't have access to medication, I still keep it to myself, either out of pride or to show that I can overcome this alone.

In terms of activities, I try my best to not avoid them even when it is not necessarily an easy thing to do, sometimes I push myself too far and end up with accidents, I had really embarrassing moments in times where I didn't have the possibility to hide my periods. In the end trans or not, menstruation doesn't seem too different to me.

**SUBMISSION BY
ANONYMOUS FEMALE TO MALE
TRANSGENDER 22 FRANCE**