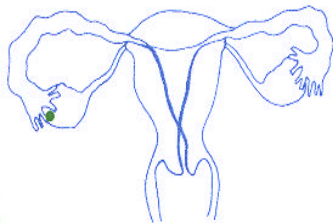
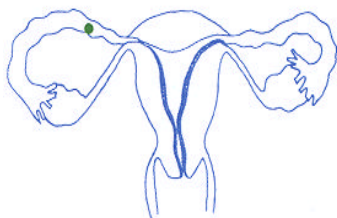


Menstrual Cycle

Menstruation, or the **Menstrual Cycle**, is a normal process for women. Girls have thousands of tiny eggs in their ovaries from the time they are born. During puberty, a girl begins to *ovulate*. This means that once a month an egg leaves one of the ovaries and travels down the fallopian tube to the uterus.



If the egg is fertilized by a sperm, it becomes an embryo which can develop into a baby. Before the menstrual period, the uterus is getting ready to nourish a baby by developing a spongy lining made up of blood and tissue.



If the egg is not fertilized, the extra lining of the uterus is not needed and it flows out of the vagina.



This bleeding is called a *period*, and the whole cycle is called *menstruation*.

When will I start to menstruate?

A girl's first period comes some time during puberty, usually between the ages of 9 and 16. Women menstruate until they are about 45 to 55 years old. When a woman permanently stops getting her period, she has reached *menopause*.

Do you have questions about your menstrual cycle?

Call the CHOICE Hotline at
215-985-3300 or
1-800-84-TEENS.

What could make my period irregular?

Your period could be irregular because you are young and your period is just beginning or because you are beginning menopause. Other factors that may change your period include medications, exercise, stress, diet, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections.

What do people use to catch the flow?

Most people use either *pads* (sanitary napkins) or *tampons* to absorb the menstrual flow. Pads come in a variety of sizes and shapes. Thicker pads should be used on days when the flow is heavy and thinner pads are for a lighter flow. Pads have an adhesive backing that sticks to your underwear so the pad won't move around.

Tampons are placed inside the vagina to absorb the menstrual flow and can be used whether or not a girl has had sex. Tampons cannot get lost inside a girl's body. You can learn how to insert a tampon from the directions on the box or from another woman. Most tampons come with a cardboard or plastic applicator to make them easier to insert. Only the tampon remains inside the body. Other tampons come without an applicator and can be inserted with your finger. Tampons have a string at one end that stays outside the body. To remove the tampon, gently pull on the string.

Pads and tampons should be changed often enough so that there is no unpleasant odor and the girl's clothes do not become stained. However never leave a tampon in for longer than eight hours.

WARNING:

TOXIC SHOCK SYNDROME

TSS is a rare infection that can happen during a woman's period. It is usually associated with super absorbent tampons that are left in for a long time. Symptoms include a sudden fever of 101 degrees or more, diarrhea, vomiting, muscle aches and a sunburn-like rash. If you have any of these symptoms during your period, call your doctor right away.

