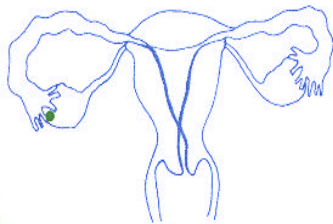
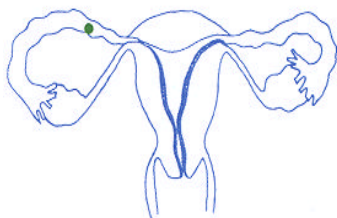


# Menstrual Cycle

**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.

**How do I keep track of my periods?**

Once your period becomes regular, keeping a record of your periods helps you to know if your period is late. A late period may be a sign of pregnancy or a medical problem.

The first day of your period is day 1. Bleeding usually lasts three to seven days. The length of your cycle is the number of days between the first day of one period and the first day of the next period. The average cycle is 28 days, but cycles can range from 21 days to 36 days.

You can keep track of your cycle by marking the first and last days of your period on a calendar. Count the number of days between the start of one period and the start of the next period. Once you have done this for a few months, you should start

to see a pattern and you can estimate when your period is going to start and end.

**When am I most fertile?**

You ovulate exactly 14 days before the start of your period. Estimate when your next period will begin and count back 14 days. This is the approximate day that you ovulate. An egg can live for 24 to 48 hours. After sex, sperm may live in the woman's body for up to five days. You are most fertile (have the greatest chance of becoming pregnant) around the day you ovulate, but if you are sexually active, there is a chance of becoming pregnant at any time in your menstrual cycle, even when you are having your period. If you are trying not to become pregnant, it is important to use a birth control method that is right for you.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9 Period starts	10	11	12	13 Period ends
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21 Ovulation likely	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4	5 Period starts	6	7	8	9 Period ends	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17 Ovulation likely
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	



**Is discharge normal?**

Yes. Women normally have discharge from their vaginas and it may change throughout their menstrual cycle. Normal discharge is clear or white in color and does not have a strong odor. If your discharge changes color, you begin to have more discharge than normal, or it has a strong odor, it could be a sign that you have an infection. If this happens, it is important to see a doctor.

Discharge is *not* normal for men. If a man has discharge, it could be a symptom of an infection and he should see a doctor.

**Is douching healthy?**

You may worry about odors and "staying fresh" when you are having your period. As long as you are healthy, bathe and shower regularly, and change your pads or tampons frequently, there is no reason for concern. Douches are products intended for women that are advertised as a means of controlling vaginal odors. In fact, douches are NOT recommended because they reduce your body's natural protective secretions and may be harmful. Douching after sexual intercourse will NOT prevent pregnancy.

