



Yarning about Girls Business



family
planning nsw
Reproductive & Sexual Health



Symbol meanings:

..... Communities

..... Periods

..... Puberty

..... Womanhood

..... Learning and support

Every girl goes through changes on the journey to becoming a woman. These journeys are girls business; unique experiences for each girl which are completely normal, positive moments to tell us that we are becoming women! Whatever stage you are at, we are all in this journey together.

Keisha Leon is an Aboriginal Graphic Designer and Artist. Keisha is a proud Waanyi–Kalkadoon (Mount Isa, Queensland) and Chinese woman. Keisha creates a visual story that is driven by culture and the modern world, connecting people, and helping create the narrative for the future.

This resource was co-designed through consultation with the Aboriginal community. We thank the participants who took the time to share their feedback, thoughts and ideas.

Family Planning NSW respectfully acknowledges the traditional owners of the land we live and work on across NSW. Our hope and belief is that we can move to a place of equity and justice and work hand-in-hand together.

April 2020, Family Planning NSW

Hello, and welcome to Yarning about Girls Business.

This booklet has been written to provide you with information on puberty and periods. In this booklet you will learn what a period is, how to use different period products, and how to look after yourself when you have your period.

Getting your period is completely normal and not shameful. It just means you are growing up.

It's important for you to understand puberty and periods, so you know what to expect and how to look after yourself. Everyone is different which means everyone's period is different, but the information in this booklet will be useful for everyone.

Puberty

Puberty is the time when a child begins to turn into an adult.

Hormones race around the body and signal some body parts to change what they are doing.

Puberty can cause physical changes in our bodies, affect how we feel emotionally, and affect the kinds of relationships we want to have with others. Lots of changes happen during puberty and some people think it is really weird, but it is all **completely normal**. Puberty can start any time from 9 years old.

For girls, one of the big changes puberty brings is the start of periods.

Um sis, I think I got my period

That's great sis! 😊 Big day for you. Do you need a pad? Want me to help you tell mum and Auntie?

Some changes that happen during puberty include:



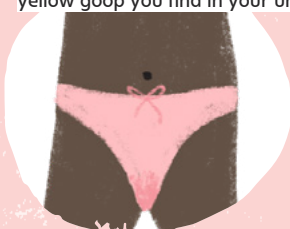
your boobs grow

your body grows more hair, even 'down there'! The hair that grows near your vulva is called pubic hair



your body grows and changes shape

you produce more discharge from your vagina (white or yellow goop you find in your undies)



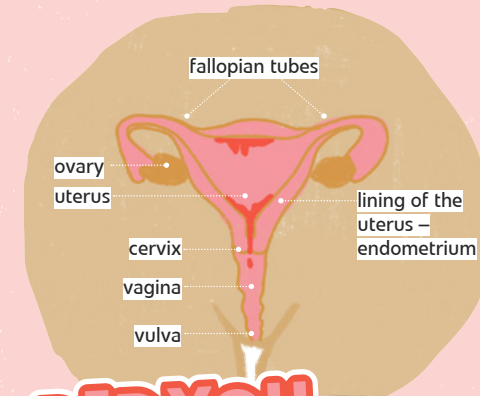
DID YOU KNOW?

Boys go through puberty too! Some of their changes are the same as girls and some are different.

What is a period?

A period is a monthly bleed from your vagina. It is what happens when a girl hits puberty and the body starts getting ready to one day become pregnant. However, just because you get your period doesn't mean you need to have a bub straight away, or at all.

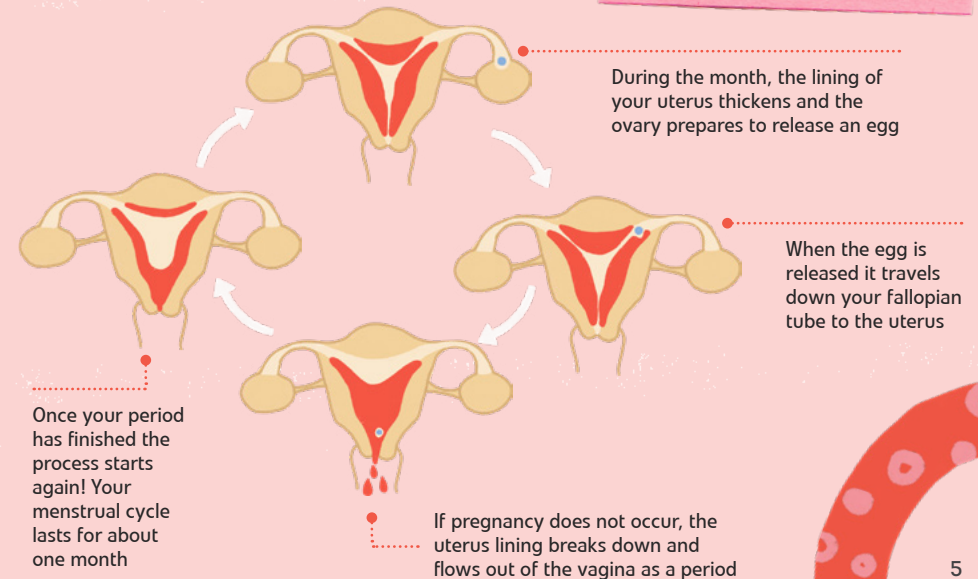
The blood in your period is actually the lining of your uterus. The lining thickens and sheds each month you don't become pregnant. This process is called your **menstrual cycle**, and it continues every month until you get a lot older, like 50! Periods usually last between 2 and 7 days, and the blood can look **bright red, dark red** or **brownish**. It can be thin and watery or thick and blobby or both.



DID YOU KNOW?

Women are born with about a million tiny eggs in their ovaries. During sex, if a sperm from a penis meets an egg in the fallopian tube it can travel to the uterus and grow into a baby.

The menstrual cycle



Your first period

Girls mostly get their first period at the age of 12 or 13, but it can come anytime between the ages of 10 and 16. Your period will start when your body is ready. You might get some pain in your tummy before your period starts, or feel a bit sick or yucky. You might not feel anything at all, everyone is different. Being prepared when you get your first period is important, as you might have no idea when it will come.

Make a period pack to have in your bag. You can take it when you go to school or to a friend's house for a sleep-over or out for the day. It will mean you're always prepared.

Your period pack can include some pads, pain relief like Panadol, and a clean pair of undies.

When you get your period for the first time, you should tell a friend or family member that you trust. They can celebrate with you, or help answer any questions you might have. If you are 16 and your period hasn't arrived it is a good idea to visit your doctor, Family Planning NSW or your local Aboriginal Medical Service for a check up.

Other words for a period:

menstruation

RAGS



TIME OF THE MONTH

a menstrual bleed

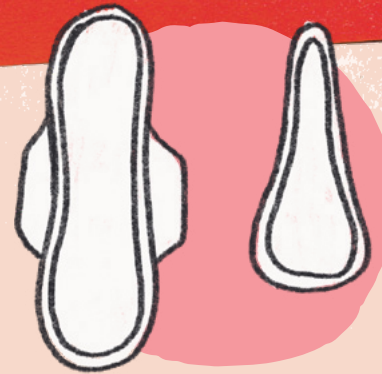
menarche
(first period)

Period products

Guess what?

You can totally play sport, swim and do all your normal activities when you have your period; you just need to wear a tampon, a menstrual cup or period swimwear in the water. How great is that?

There are lots of products you can use when you have your period. You can buy most of them from your local chemist or supermarket. Period products can be used either externally (on the outside of your body, like a pad), or internally (in the inside of your vagina, like a tampon).



Pads

Pads are flat pieces of soft material with a sticky side you stick to your undies. Pads catch and soak up your period blood as it comes out of your vagina. Pads can come with wings, be very long or quite short, thick or thin. You might want to wear a thick and long pad overnight, but a thin and short pad in the day. Pads can only be used once, and once used should be thrown in the bin.



Period undies

Period undies are underwear that have a thick, absorbent lining. They are designed to catch and absorb your period, and you don't need to wear any other product with them. Period undies should be washed after each use. Period undies can be bought at some leading supermarkets, or online from stores such as Love Luna, Modibodi, Ruby Love or Thinx.

Period products

DID YOU KNOW?

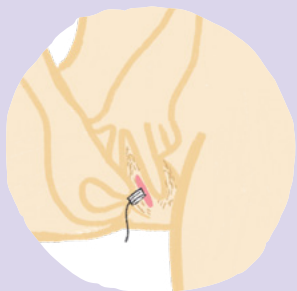
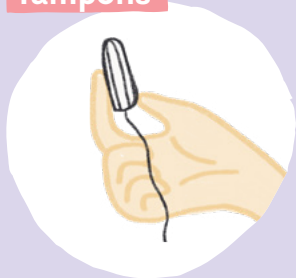
There are different sizes of pads and tampons, and they need to be changed every 2-6 hours depending on how heavy your period is. Period undies and cups should be emptied or washed every 8-12 hours or as needed.



Menstrual cups

Menstrual cups are soft silicone cups that you push inside your vagina where they sit and catch your period. At least once every 8-12 hours you should remove the cup, empty it and wash it before you reinsert. It is important you follow the instructions in the packet and only use trusted brands.

Tampons



Tampons are cotton tubes a few centimeters long that you push into your vagina. You leave them in for a few hours (no more than 8) to soak up the blood flowing out your vagina. Inserting and wearing a tampon should not hurt or feel uncomfortable; if it does it has not been inserted correctly. Tampons can only be used once, and once used should be wrapped in toilet paper and thrown in the bin.

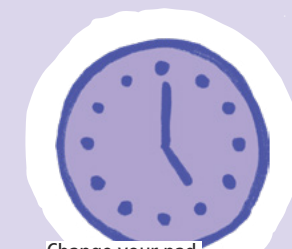
Hygiene

When you start going through puberty and getting your period, it's important that you...



Shower or wash every day

Wear clean clothes and underwear



Change your pad, tampon or menstrual cup regularly throughout the day



Wash your hands before and after inserting or removing a tampon or menstrual cup and after changing a pad.

DID YOU KNOW?

You will know it is time to change your pad or tampon if they are leaky or full. How often you should change depends on how heavy your period is. It is a good idea to change your pad or tampon when you wake up in the morning and every few hours throughout the day.

Sis, sometimes at school I think I smell like period...

That's ok sis, don't feel shame! Just make sure you change your pad and shower regularly

Period pain & more

Period pain is normal. Really bad or long lasting pain is not!

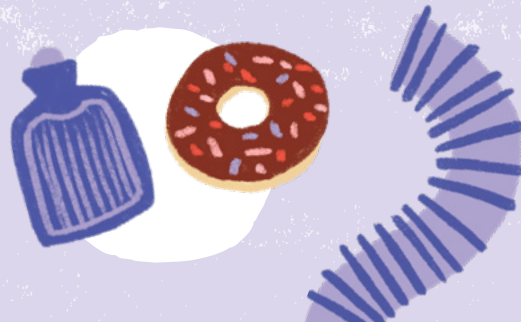
DID YOU KNOW?

Exercise can help reduce your period pain.

Sometimes when you're getting your period, or when you are about to get your period, you can feel pain in your tummy or in your lower back. You might get moody or sad, have headaches or tummy bloating or feel like eating everything. You might not feel different at all.

This is all ok and normal. It's important to take care of yourself when you're getting your period. Putting a heat pack on your tummy or back and taking some pain relief can help make you feel better.

If your period pain is so bad it stops you from going to school or work or being able to concentrate and do things in your life, you should go to your doctor, a Family Planning NSW clinic or local [Aboriginal Medical Service](#) to talk about ways to manage it. To feel more comfortable you can ask for a female doctor or nurse.



You might also be wondering...

Q. Can a tampon get stuck inside you?

A. Very, VERY rarely would this ever happen. When you insert a tampon you leave a cotton string outside your vagina, which you use to pull the tampon out. If a tampon ever does get stuck, you can get it removed at the doctors.

Q. How much blood will come out?

A. The average person only releases 2-3 tablespoons of blood each period, but everyone is different. Generally your first few periods will be very light and only last a few days. This can change as you get older. If your period is often or always very heavy it can be a good idea to visit your doctor, a Family Planning NSW clinic or local Aboriginal Medical Service to talk about ways to manage it.

Q. Can I get pregnant when I'm on my period?

A. Yes, you can. Pregnancy occurs when your egg has been released from an ovary and if it meets with a sperm during sex. While the chance is lower during your period, it can still happen. Sometimes an egg can be released while you are on your period and sperm can live inside your body for about six days, so its important to use contraception (like condoms) every time you have sex.

Q. My period doesn't come every month, is something wrong?

A. Likely no! While most menstrual cycles follow a rough 28 day cycle, in the first few years of getting your period your cycle might be longer or shorter. This usually does not mean anything is wrong, but if you are concerned you can chat with your doctor. Your period should become more regular as you get older.

Q: I look like a girl but I feel like a boy! Am I normal?

A. Yes, you are normal. Some people might be born one gender, but feel very different inside. These feeling might start during puberty, and feeling this way is ok. It might be something that will change with time, or it might be the way you are. It's ok if you're feeling confused or scared, you are not alone! More information can be found here: bodytalk.org.au/relationships/your-sexuality



Other places to find information:

For Family Planning NSW clinics, information and resources:

www.fpnsw.org.au/Aboriginal

For information on puberty, periods and growing up

www.bodytalk.org.au

To confidentially speak to a clinician, call Talkline

between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday

Talkline: 1300 658 886

www.fpnsw.org.au/talkline

To find your closest Aboriginal Medical Service, visit

healthinonet.ecu.edu.au and look under 'Locations'.



Family Planning NSW is a not for profit organisation
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