

Understanding periods

Introduction

Whilst it is important that boys understand menstruation, teachers may choose to deliver this session to girls as a single-sex group.

Samples of sanitary products can be ordered from most well-known manufacturers. Two that were available at the time of writing are:

<https://www.always.co.uk/en-gb/puberty-education-programme-always-tampax>

<https://lil-lets.com/uk/school-programme>

Transgender children who are transitioning from female to male may still be affected by periods, and will need to have the information necessary for them to deal with this. Similarly, male to female transgender children will need to understand the menstrual cycle so they can feel comfortable with this aspect of women's lives. It is important to consult with parents of transgender children, and with the children themselves, to ensure that the learning complements the other support that the child is receiving.

Key stage 2

Learning intention

- To understand the process of menstruation, and to be able to deal with periods in everyday life

Learning outcomes

- To understand the menstrual cycle
- To understand how to use sanitary protection, and where to access sanitary products
- To understand the impact of periods, and to manage them confidently

Resources

- "Hair in Funny Places" by Babette Cole
- Diagram of the female reproductive organs
- Cycle cards (see below)
- Sample sanitary products
- A cycle timeline marked from day 1 to day 28

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
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- Cycle cards (one statement per card):
 1. Hormones make the lining of the uterus thicken ready for a baby to grow

2. Hormones make the egg leave the ovary
3. The fimbriae help the egg travel down the Fallopian tube into the uterus
4. If the egg is not fertilised, hormones tell the brain that the lining is not needed because the woman is not pregnant. The lining is shed through the vagina and this is the woman's period

Teacher introduction

Start by saying: We are going to be looking at periods. These are sometimes called menstruation and they affect girls and women for most of their lives. It is nothing to be worried about but it is important that you understand it so you can be confident about looking after yourself while you have your period every month.

Activity 1

Explain that "periods," "menstruation" and "the menstrual cycle" are all words for the process that women experience every month. Ask if they know of any other words or phrases, such as "time of the month."

Remind the children that even though they may use other terms at home, in school the proper words will be used.

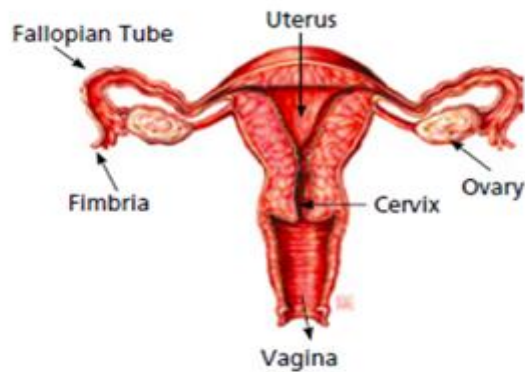
Read "Hair in Funny Places" by Babette Cole and when finished go back to the pages where the girl finds blood in her knickers.

Activity 2

Explain to the class that hormones are substances made by our bodies that help us to grow and function properly. We have lots of different hormones that do different things. For example, some hormones make us grow or help us digest our food. Some hormones control our reproductive system. This means the parts of our bodies that help human beings to have babies.

Activity 3

Internal Female Reproductive System:



Show the children whereabouts in the body the organs are situated. Explain the function of each part:

- The ovaries are where eggs (ova) are formed and stored. Girls are born with their lifetime supply of eggs already present in the ovaries.
- Fimbriae are a fringe of tissue around the entrance to the Fallopian tube.
- The Fallopian tubes are connected to the uterus and the egg travels down these to reach the uterus.
- The uterus is where a baby grows until it is ready to be born.
- The cervix is the entrance to the uterus from the vagina. It is a small opening but stretches in childbirth to allow the baby to be born.
- The vagina is the muscular tube through which sperm travel during sexual intercourse and through which babies are born.

Activity 4

Split the children into small groups and give each group a timeline of days 1-28 and a set of cycle cards.

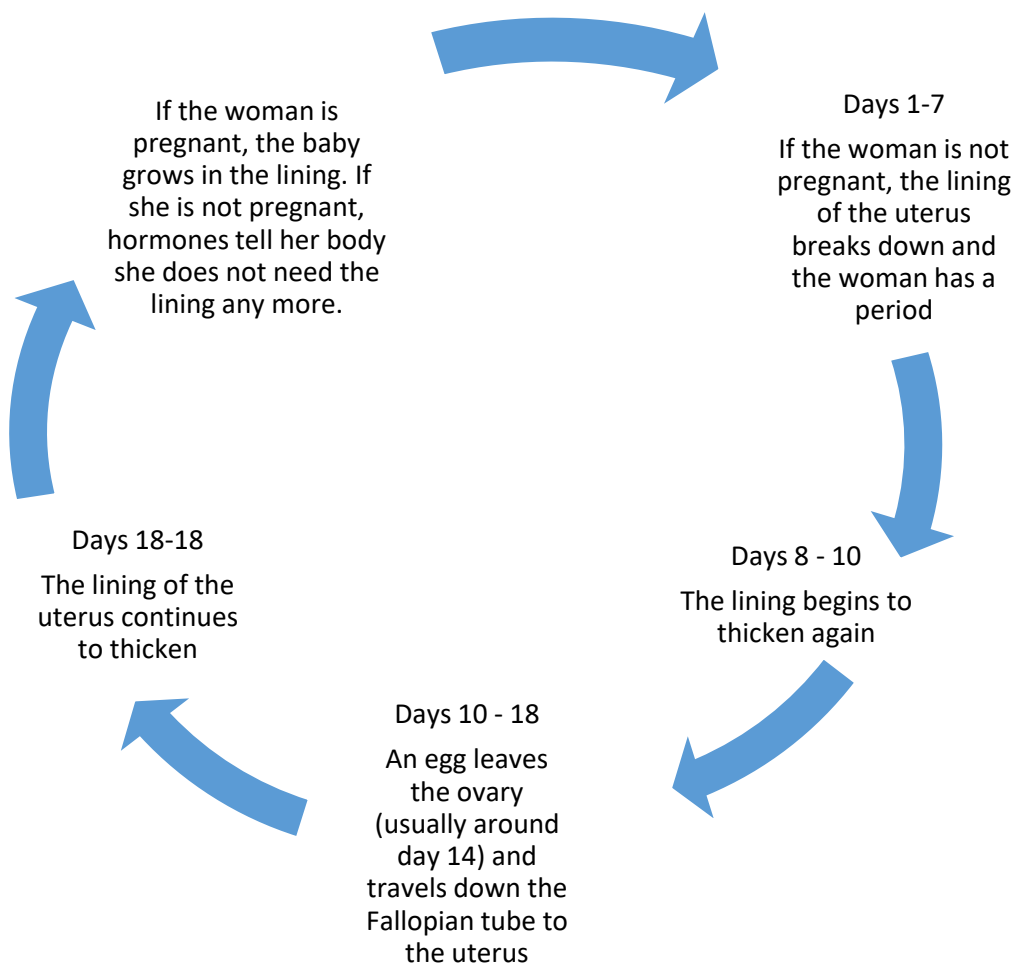
Ask the children to place the cards on the timeline to show the order in which they think the cycle occurs. For example, if they think that the egg is released from the ovary on the first day they should put that card against 1 on the timeline.

Show the children the correct sequence:

What happens	Where in the cycle this happens
Hormones make the lining of the uterus start to thicken ready for a baby to grow	Days 7 - 16
Hormones make an egg leave the ovary. This is called ovulation	Days 11 – 18 (usually around day 14)

The fimbriae help the egg travel down the Fallopian tube into the uterus. The lining of the uterus continues to thicken.	Days 18 – 28
If the egg is not fertilised, hormones tell the brain that the lining is not needed because the woman is not pregnant. The lining is shed through the vagina and this is called the woman's period	Day 1 - 7
<i>Stress that these timings can vary from woman to woman and that although 28 days is the average length of a cycle, it is nothing to worry about if they are shorter or longer</i>	

Show this diagram to ensure the children understand the cyclical nature of this process:



Explain to the children that if the egg meets a sperm and is fertilised, it settles in the lining of the womb to grow into a baby. Hormones tell the brain that the lining is needed because there is a baby growing in the womb. The woman does not have a period and this is usually her first clue that she is pregnant.

Ensure that the children understand that the egg is very small – about the width of a single human hair.

Explain to the children that most women will have a period every month until they are about 50 years old. The point at which a woman stops having periods is called the menopause.

Activity 5

Refer back to “Hair in Funny Places.” Ask the children what signs of puberty the girl experienced before she began her periods.

Explain that a girl will generally develop body hair, then her breasts will start to grow. Periods usually start around two years after breast development begins.

Explain to the children that their periods will start when their body is ready. This can be as early as 8 years old or not until they are in the teens. Anything between the ages of 8 and 16 is considered normal. They should not worry if they are developing at a different rate to their friends.

When a girl first starts her periods, they can take some time to settle down and become regular. Although most women have a period every 28 days or so, it is normal for a cycle to be shorter or longer – every woman is different.

Scribe a list of people that the children can talk to if they are worried about their periods or puberty.

Activity 6

Ask the children what they think a woman needs to help her when she has her period.

Show the sanitary products and explain how they are used to help keep the woman clean and comfortable while she is having her period.

Explain that there are other types of sanitary protection, such as period pants, reusable pads, and menstrual cups, but that while a girl is getting used to having periods she may want to use pads or tampons. It is up to each girl or woman to find the protection that works best for her.

Ask the children if they know which toilet cubicles have sanitary bins. Make sure they know where the bins are (some schools mark these cubicles with a sticker so it is clear where the bins are located).

Ensure the children also know where they can get sanitary products if they need them while at school.

The Red Box Project helps schools to offer free sanitary protection for girls from low-income families to ensure that their periods do not interfere with their education. Their website is:

<http://redboxproject.org/schools/>

Activity 9

Refer back to “Hair in Funny Places.” Ask the children what else the girl experienced when she started her periods. Scribe a list (mood swings, anger). Add that sometimes periods can be

uncomfortable and that girls may experience cramps, sore breasts and headaches. All of these things can be called Pre-Menstrual Syndrome or Pre-Menstrual Tension (PMS or PMT).

Ask the children to think about ways they can deal with PMS. Ensure they understand that it is okay to take painkillers for period pain but they should always check with an adult before taking medication.

Give each child a piece of paper. Ask them to write a list of advice for a girl who might be having a difficult period. Include ideas such as:

- Make sure you eat healthy food
- Get plenty of sleep
- Drink plenty of water
- Get gentle exercise
- If things are annoying you, try to find something else to do. If you can, tell other people that you have got PMS and say you are sorry but it is making you feel very grumpy or sad.

Ask the children to come up with ideas for how your school can support girls who are having their period. For example, some schools give girls a “period pass” which means teachers know that they might have to go to the toilets more often than at other times of the month.

Ensure the children know that if they are worried about their periods or their PMS they can talk to a doctor. In some cases where PMS or periods are causing lots of problems, a doctor can prescribe medicines to help.

Plenary

Remind the children what they have learned:

- What happens during the menstrual cycle.
- That periods are natural and nothing to be worried or embarrassed about.
- That it is normal to start periods at different ages.
- How to deal with periods and PMS.
- That if they are worried about their periods they should speak to their doctor.

Debriefing activity

Having periods is a sign that a girl is growing up and will one day be able to have a baby herself if she wants to. Although they can be a nuisance, periods are a wonderful process that show how amazing our bodies are, and we should be proud of the fact that we are getting to be mature young adults. Allow a moment’s reflection and close the lesson.

Differentiation for SEND

Intimate care may be needed for pupils who need help managing their periods, such as changing pads in school. This should be reflected in the school’s intimate care or SEND policies.

