

Tips for Talking to Your Child about Menstruation

Each FCPS student will learn about puberty and menstruation as part of the comprehensive health education program. This resource is to help parents discuss this topic with their student.

Talk early and often: The earlier you begin talking to your child about the changes to expect during puberty, the better. Don't plan a single tell-all discussion. Instead, plan on a series of conversations. If your child asks questions about menstruation, answer them openly and honestly. If your child isn't asking questions, it's up to you to start talking about menstruation.

You might start by asking what your child knows about puberty. Clarify any misinformation, ask if your child has questions, and explain the basics. Share your experiences. Follow up on any health lessons and sex education your child is receiving in school. If your child is resistant to talking, don't give up.

Your child needs to know the facts about the menstrual cycle and all the changes that puberty brings. Friends might provide inaccurate information. Talking to your child can help eliminate unfounded fears or anxiety, as well as positively influence your child's body image. Also, the conversations you have with your child about menstruation can lay the groundwork for future talks about dating and sexuality.

Start talking about menstruation in general terms from an early age. Don't wait until your student has experienced menarche or has other students talking about it. As your student gets older, get into specifics. You can talk with your child more about what that menstruation means -- such as what a first period is like and being able to get pregnant if she/he has sex.

Answer questions with simple, factual information that is age appropriate. Don't feel the need to elaborate or go into extensive explanations because you're nervous. Use the links on the last page to learn more information. Know that "I don't know," is a perfectly acceptable answer. Sometimes children ask questions that we aren't prepared for. Don't just hand your student a book or video. You can use a book or video as a starting point to discuss menstruation, but watch it or read it together and talk afterwards.

Everyone's different: Remind your child not to worry about when friends begin to menstruate — or if their periods seem different. Explain that menstruation, including cycle length and flow, varies from person to person and sometimes month to month.

It's also common for teens to have irregular periods. It might take six years or more after your period starts for a cycle to become regular. The average menstrual cycle lasts 28 days — counting from the first day of one period to the first day of the next period. Although cycles in young teens can range from 21 to 45 days, longer cycles are more common for the first few years after menstruation begins.

Teach your child how to track periods on a calendar or by using a smartphone app. Eventually your child might be able to predict when periods will begin. Keeping track of periods can also help your child and your child's doctor identify any possible menstrual disorders or other health problems.

Be positive

The changes associated with puberty can be a little scary. Reassure your child that it's normal to feel apprehensive about menstruating, but it's nothing to be too worried about — and you're there to answer any questions.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is menstruation?

A: Menstruation (men-STRAY-shuhn) is a woman's monthly bleeding. When you menstruate, your body sheds the lining of the uterus (womb). Menstrual blood flows from the uterus through the small opening in the cervix and passes out of the body through the vagina. Most menstrual periods last from 3 to 5 days.

Q: When does a girl usually get her first period?

A: In the United States, the average age for a girl to get her first period is 12. This does not mean that all girls start at the same age. A girl can start her period anytime between the ages of 8 and 15. Most of the time, the first period starts about 2 years after breasts first start to develop. If a girl has not had her first period by age 15, or if it has been more than 2 to 3 years since breast growth started, she should see a doctor.

Q: What is a typical menstrual period like?

A: During your period, you shed the thickened uterine lining and extra blood through the vagina. Your period may not be the same every month. It may also be different than other women's periods. Periods can be light, moderate, or heavy in terms of how much blood comes out of the vagina. This is called menstrual flow. The length of the period also varies. Most periods last from 3 to 5 days. But, anywhere from 2 to 7 days is normal.

Q: How often should I change my pad and/or tampon?

A: You should change a pad before it becomes soaked with blood. Each woman decides for herself what works best. You should change a tampon at least every 4 to 8 hours. Make sure to use the lowest absorbency tampon needed for your flow. For example, use junior or regular tampons on the lightest day of your period. Using a super absorbency tampon when not needed or not changing your tampon frequently may increase your risk for toxic shock syndrome (TSS). TSS is a rare but sometimes deadly disease. TSS occurs when bacteria that produce toxins (poisons) grow in your body. The blood that comes with menstruation and is absorbed by a tampon can serve as a place for these bacteria to grow. The toxins made by the bacteria cause an over-activation of your immune system (body's defense) that can produce severe symptoms that can lead to death. (Many of the tampons that were found to cause TSS have been taken off of the market)

Q: When should I see a doctor about my period?

A: See your doctor about your period if:

- You have not started menstruating by the age of 15.*
- You have not started menstruating within 3 years after breast growth began, or if breasts haven't started to grow by age 13.*
- Your period suddenly stops for more than 90 days after you have had regular, monthly cycles.*
- Your periods become very irregular after having had regular, monthly cycles.*
 - Your period occurs more often than every 21 days or less often than every 35 days.*
- You are bleeding for more than 7 days.*
- You are bleeding more heavily than usual or using more than 1 pad or tampon every 1 to 2 hours.*
- You bleed between periods.*
- You have severe pain during your period.*

Additional Resources:

All About Puberty: A Handbook for Children and Parents

http://www.srcp.org/pdf_versions/allaboutpubertySRCP.pdf

Girlshealth.gov offers students reliable, useful information on health and well-being, including a section on menstruation.

<https://www.girlshealth.gov/body/period/>

All About Menstruation - Kids Health

<http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/menstruation.html>

Talking to Your Child about Menstruation

<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/talk-about-menstruation.html>

What Girls Need to Know About Growing Up

Understanding Your Period and Menstrual Cycle

<http://teens.webmd.com/girls-puberty-10/girls-menstrual-cycle>

Tampons, Pads, and other Period Supplies

<http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/supplies.html?WT.ac=t-ra>

How to Correctly Insert/Remove Tampon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ys1GxjFclCE>

Menstruation: Preparing your preteen for her period

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/tween-and-teen-health/in-depth/menstruation/art-20046004>

Spanish version:

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/es-es/healthy-lifestyle/tween-and-teen-health/in-depth/menstruation/art-20046004>

Menstruation and Mental Disability: Advice for Parents of Adolescent Girls

<http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/En/HealthAZ/DevelopmentalStages/Tweens/Pages/Menstruation-and-Mental-Disability-Advice-for-Parents-of-Adolescent-Girls.aspx>

American Federation for the Blind: Family Connect: Talking to Your Daughter about Menstruation

<http://www.familyconnect.org/info/browse-by-age/grade-schoolers/growth-and-development-grade-schoolers/menstruation/1235>

Dads, Daughters, and Menstruation

<https://gayswithkids.com/2015/04/24/dads-daughters-menstruation/>

What to do When My Daughter Starts Her Period

http://www.singledad.com/how-to-be-a-better-dad/articles/what_to_do_when_my_daughter_starts_her_period_1264480694.php