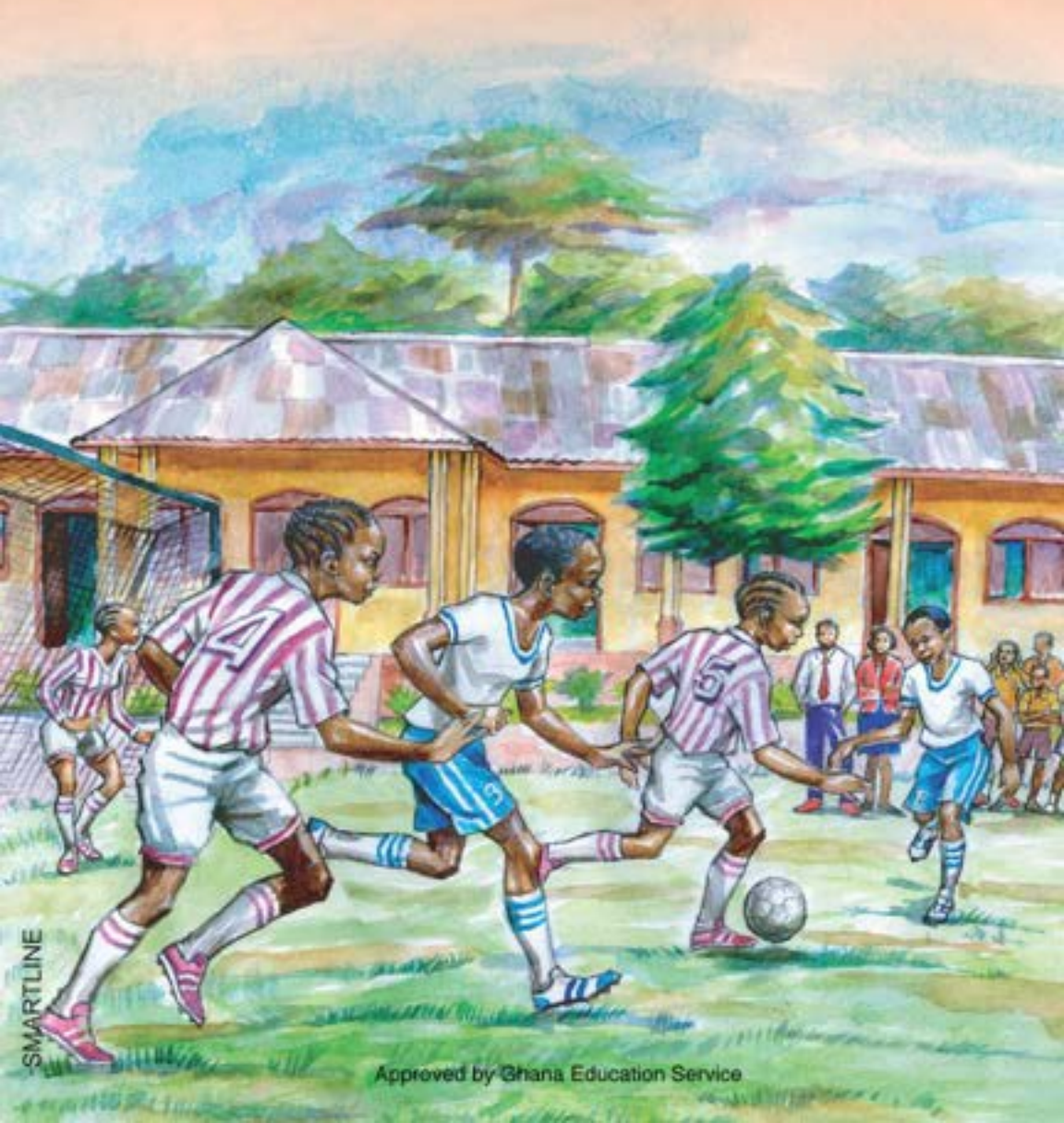


Growth and Changes



Growth and Changes

Smartline



WaterAid

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What is puberty?

Between the ages of 10 and 14 most girls and boys begin to notice changes in their bodies. These physical and emotional changes take place over a number of years.

These changes are sometimes called “**puberty**” or “**adolescence**,” and girls and boys at this age are often called “**adolescents**.”



Puberty starts when extra amounts of chemicals called “**hormones**” begin to be produced in the body. These hormones lead to changes in the body.

Apart from causing physical changes, the hormones cause emotional changes too. So a growing girl may feel happy one moment, angry, sad or confused the next moment.



Puberty is the time at which girls begin to produce eggs, and boys begin to produce sperm. It is the time when we develop into young women and men.

It is a very special time, and it is our bodies' way of maturing so that one day we can have children and start our own families.

Even though girls' bodies start having the ability to have children, it does not mean that girls are ready to have children.



When does puberty begin and how long does it take?

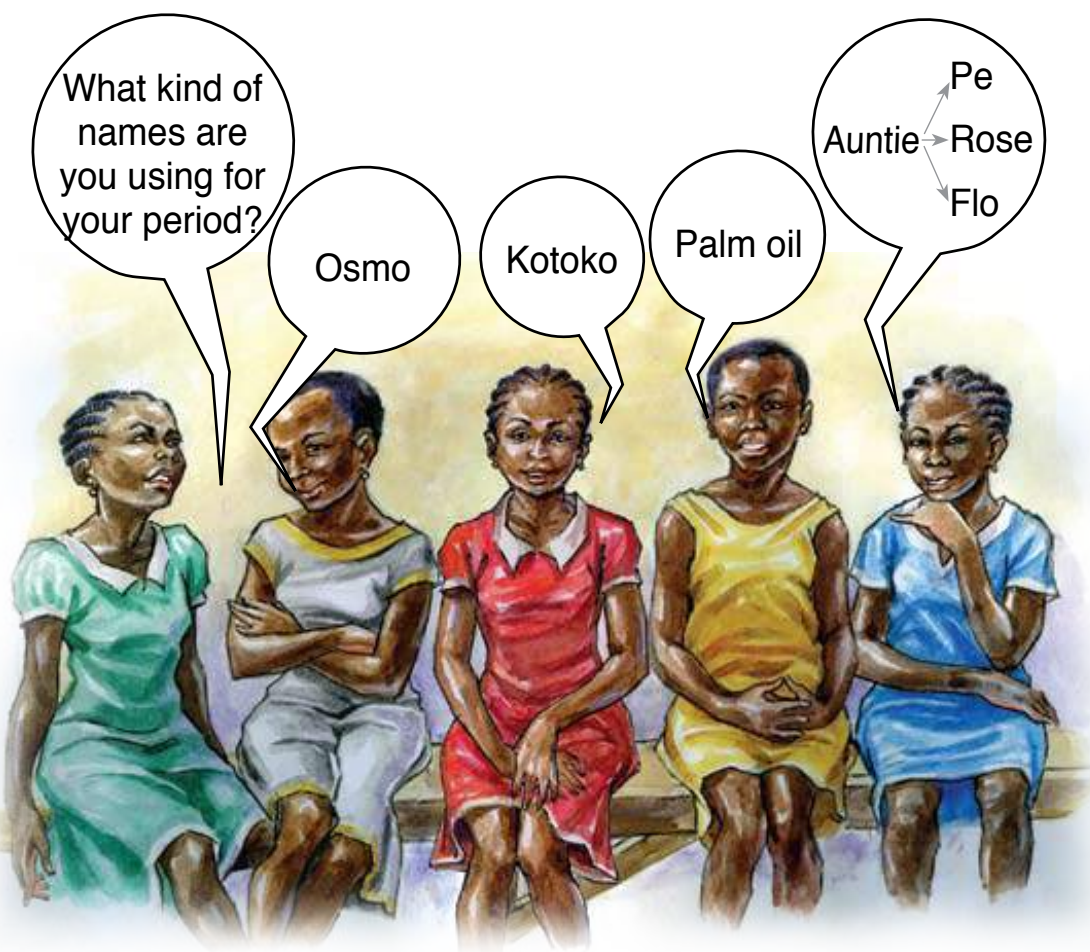
Changes take place in girls and boys at different times. Generally changes start earlier for girls than for boys. Some start before the age of 10, while others start after age 14.

For some girls, changes may take place in one year or less. In others, they can take as long as six years.



What are the physical changes that take place in girls?

A girl's breasts start to grow and her hips get rounder. Hair starts to grow under her arms. Hair grows on and around the vagina. She starts to menstruate (have her period).

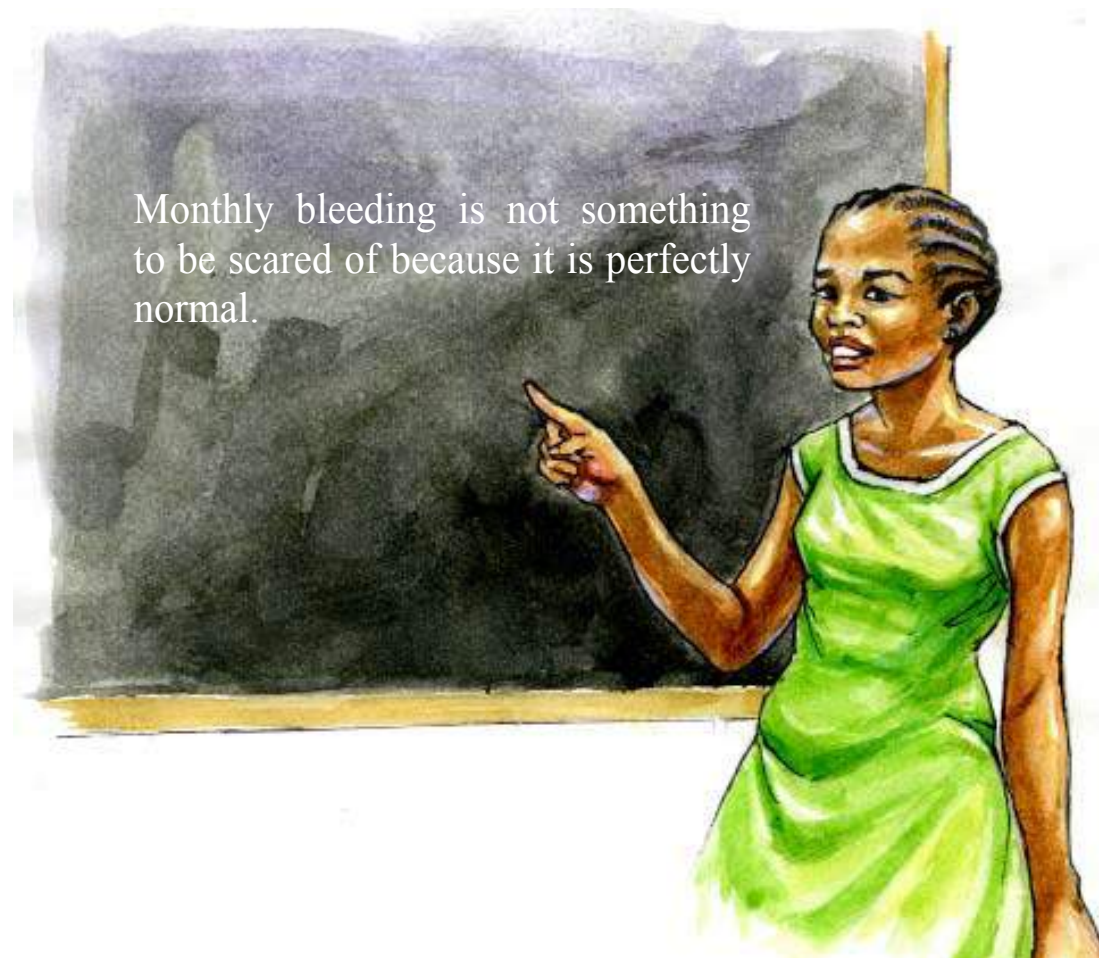


What is menstruation?

Menstruation means that a girl's body is growing up, and is preparing for the future when she might get pregnant and have a baby.

During menstruation, the lining of the **uterus** comes out along with blood through the **vagina**. Bleeding usually lasts for 4-7 days and usually happens every month.

Monthly bleeding is not something to be scared of because it is perfectly normal.





Most girls have their first period between the ages of 11 to 14. Some girls start as early as 8, and some at 17 or older.

The time from the first day of a girl's period (when bleeding starts) to the first day of your next period is usually 28 days (one month), but can range from 21-35 days. For many years after a girl starts having her period, she may not get her period every month. It can skip months. This is normal.



When a girl has her period, she should wash at least twice a day with water in the area around the vagina. She can use period cloths, cotton wool or pads to soak up the blood. These should be changed every few hours. If a girl is going to school, she should take an extra period cloth, cotton wool or pad in a plastic bag so that she can change after a few hours.

If a girl has a blood stain on her uniform in school, she can tie a cloth or sweater around her waist, and ask a friend or teacher to help.

Although menstruation means a girl is biologically able to have a baby, girls are not advised to have a child until they are over 18 years old. This is because other changes in her body are still taking place. Having a baby when your body is not ready can cause many health problems for a girl and her baby.

If a girl who has her periods every month misses a period, it may mean that she is pregnant. But girls can also miss their periods if they are feeling stressed, if they become too thin, or if they have been traveling.



Does having a period hurt?

Some girls do not feel pain when they have their period, some have slight pains below the navel and in their lower back and some have a lot of pain and may need to take pain medicine.

Usually the pain is not very bad and does not last long. The pains are called “**cramps**” because they are caused by the muscles of the **uterus** contracting. It is the contraction of the uterus that pushes out the lining of the uterus each month.



What is PMS?

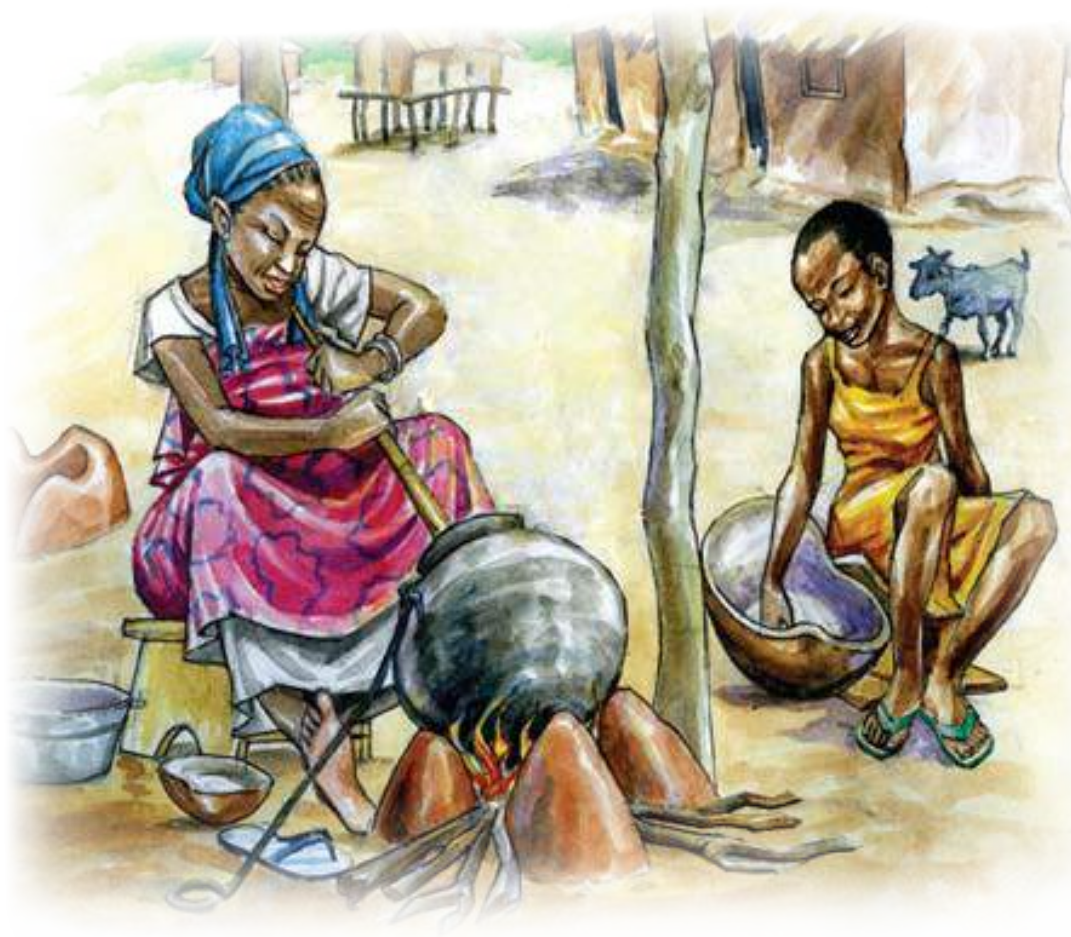
PMS is short for pre-menstrual syndrome. Not all girls get this, but many do for a few days before they start their period. This is because changes in the level of hormones in a girl's body can affect her moods.

Some girls feel sad. Others feel irritable, and get angry for no real reason. Some girls' breasts feel swollen and sore. This is all normal and natural and should not worry you.



Talk to your mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunties, and female teachers. When you have your period, some discomfort is normal, but if you have too much pain, you may need medication so talk to an older woman to ask her advice.

Normally when you have your period, you may need to change your period cloth, cotton wool or pads 3-4 times a day. If you need to change more times, you may be bleeding too much so ask an older woman, a nurse, or doctor for advice.



Adjoa's Story



I was in class 4 the first day my menstruation came. I was sitting in class and my stomach was paining me. I did not know what to do. I could not even sit properly on the chair. Master asked me to write on the board. When I got up, people started laughing. Then somebody told me my uniform was wet. I touched my dress and saw there was blood on it. Master did not see but the class saw. I started crying and told master I was sick. He asked what was wrong but I could not tell him because I felt shy. He said if I am sick, I should go home. I did not want to walk on the street with blood on my dress. I asked my friend for a cloth. She is a Muslim and brings cloth

to school so she can pray. I covered myself and I got up to go. Everybody was hooting at me. My friend who gave me the cloth got her period last month and so she told me it was my period. She did not laugh but told me I should be careful because now I can get pregnant. I started crying because I thought I was pregnant. When I went home, my sister was there and I told her that there was blood in my dress. She told me not to worry, it means I am mature. If a young girl has not yet gotten her period and sees something, she should not be afraid. She should go to someone who has gotten her period. They will tell her not to worry. It is not a disease. If she has an older sister, she should talk to her.

Abena's Story

I had been hearing the elderly people discuss menstruation but I did not take them seriously. I thought they were laughing at women when they always talked about the blood. But one day, when I woke up, I saw that my bed was wet with blood. I was surprised. I didn't know where it was coming from. I saw that my dress was wet. I looked down and saw that it was coming from my private part. My underwear was full of blood. I started crying and I ran to my mother. I told her what was happening to me and she said that it is normal. I should not worry but that is all she said. I did not



Abena's Story

understand it and so I went to my friend. She also told me not to worry and that last month, it happened to her. She is the one who told me what to do and what I can use. I will tell a young girl that when she gets her first menstruation, she should not be surprised. Sometimes, she will have stomach pains but that is normal. I will also make sure that she knows that the blood will be flowing from her vagina and not anywhere else. I will tell her to use period cloth or pad so that she does not disgrace herself. She should make sure she bathes regularly otherwise she may smell and when she walks with friends, she might feel shy.

Akua's Story



The first day I had my menstruation, I was in the bathroom when I saw blood in my pant. I became afraid because I didn't have any knowledge about it. Also nobody was in the house and the pain I was feeling in my vagina was too much for me. The blood flow was also too much. So I folded my T-shirt and I sat on it. When my mother came back, I told her and she was happy. I did not understand her. I said to myself, what is wrong with this woman. I am hurt and you are happy. She then asked me to go and take my bath. She took my panties and she fixed a pad in it for me. And then she said, I can see you are very unhappy. This is what we call menstruation. Every girl

will get it as she is growing up. It is a mark to show that you are a woman and you can give birth. So cheer up my girl. But there are certain things you should know during that period. You must have a bath twice a day. You should wear dry pants. You should put lemon in your bathing water. All these will prevent you from any bad odour. You must have total control over yourself as an adolescent girl because you can be pregnant when you have sex with someone. My advice to young girls is that menstruation is not anything strange. It is natural. Every young girl will go through it. Just be careful and when you see it, don't be afraid to tell your mother about it. She will show you what to do.

Yaa's Story



The first day I had my menstruation, it was on a Sunday afternoon. My mother, my sisters and I were sitting in the room watching a movie. When we were sitting in the room, I felt like urinating. My vagina was feeling different and so I went to the urinal pit. When I got to the pit and took off my panties, I saw that there was blood in my pant. I called my mother to come and see something strange that is happening to me. She came quickly and I told her what had happened to me and she started laughing but she

did not say anything. Later on, she called me and she said, my daughter, I want to tell you about menstruation. She also told me that if a man or a boy calls me, I should not go to that man. Some of the men will want to have sex with me but I should not allow them to. If I have sex with a man, I will get pregnant and that will be the end of my education. She said, my daughter, remember that you want to become a medical doctor so you should fear men. She told me not to hurry in life, not to rush. I should learn hard at school.

Afia's Story



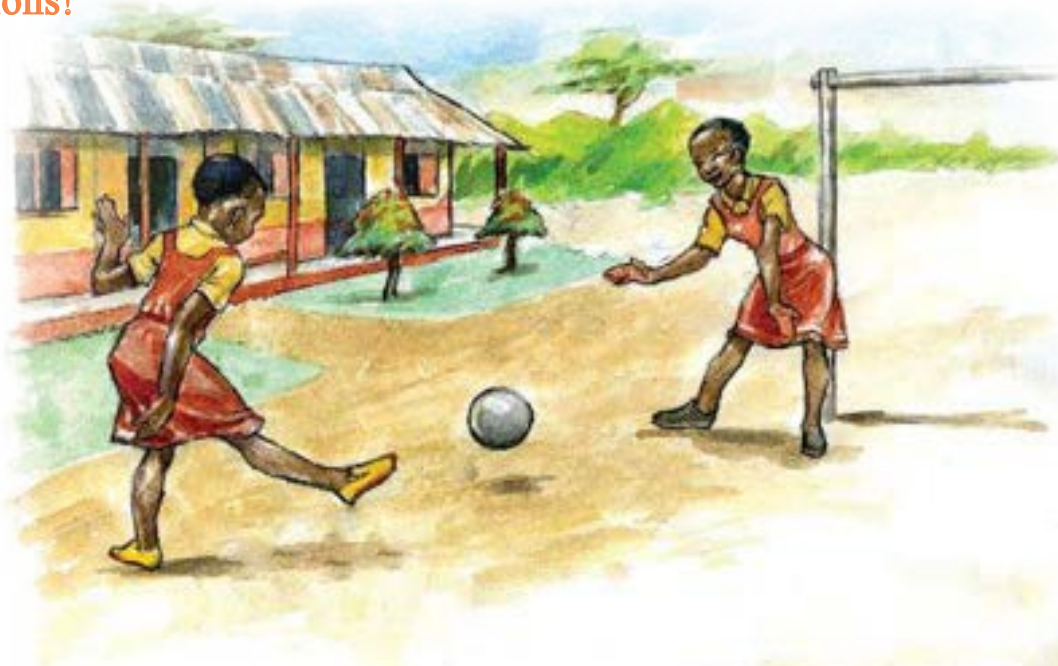
On August 12, 2006, it wasn't the happiest day because my uncle's wife was being buried. I took a stroll to forget what was going on. As I was moving, I felt like I had diarrhoea. I rushed home to attend to nature's call. I checked my panties and there were blood stains. My first thought was that I had stomach cancer because my mind was filled with my uncle's wife's illness. I took off my panty and showed it to my female cousins. They burst into laughter. I got angry because I didn't expect that. They asked me to bathe. After bathing I saw my cousin fix a pad in one of my panties. Then I remembered there was something called menstruation. I felt so uncomfortable that day because anytime I sat, I felt like I had stained

myself. I also realized I had gotten pimples on my face. When I went to school, I was a little shy but I gathered courage and told my friends. It took a year for me to accept that as a girl, every month, you menstruate. I will advise young girls about how I had mine, the way I felt, and all the things people have been saying about periods which are not true. I will protect her and keep her from soiling herself. She should understand that when she sees blood for the first time, there will be some pains, it's normal, she should not say that she is sick or pregnant. I will help the girl who does not have information know that she should not feel shy to tell the parent because every parent would like to know what is wrong with their child. And she will feel okay everywhere without turning to check her back.

Answering the “how to” questions!

How to manage your first period?

- Talk to your elders...your mother, grandmother, auntie, sister, female friend or an older woman in your community... they will give you good advice.
- Do not feel afraid...it can be scary to see the blood on your panties ...but it is very normal and natural.
- If you are at school...tell the school nurse or a female teacher or a fellow female student...they will help you.
- Feel proud...your body is developing into a young woman!



How to capture the blood?

- Place a period cloth or a pad or cotton wool on your panties.
- Change the cloth/pad/cotton wool every 2-3 hours or if you think that the blood flow is getting heavy.

How to dispose of the period cloth/ pad/cotton wool?

- If you are using a pad or cotton wool, wrap it in paper so it is a clean package and drop in the latrine or put into the dustbin so it can be burned/ thrown away later.
- If you are using a period cloth, put it into a plastic bag until you can wash it with hot water and soap, dry it in the sun and iron it.



How to keep yourself clean during your period?

- Every day (morning and evening) wash your private parts with water.
- Keep unused cloths and pads clean (wrapped in tissue or plastic bag) for future use.
- Pat the area dry with a towel, and put a fresh period cloth or cotton wool or pad on your panties.



How to manage the stomach pain (cramps) from your period?

- You can put a warm cloth on your stomach area when you are resting.
- You can try to do some exercises and keep your body active.
- You can drink a warm cup of water.
- You can take pain medicines every 4-6 hours on the most painful days.

Is it normal if ...?

Is it normal if I do not get my period every month?

Yes, when girls' bodies are developing, the period is often not regular and can skip months.

Is it normal to get your period 5 days one time, 6 days another time and 4 days another time?

Yes, every girl's period is different and will last different numbers of days as she is growing up.

Is it normal if you get your period on a different day each month?

Yes, a typical menstrual cycle is 28 days but it can range between 21 and 35 days depending on the girl.

Is it normal if I get my period for 3 days and my friend gets her period for 5 days?

Yes, the average length of a period is 5 days but it can range from 2 to 7 days.

Is it normal to get breast pains when you are growing up?

Yes, as a girl's body is developing, many inside changes are happening and small pains are natural.

Is it normal that boys do not get periods?

Yes, boys' bodies are different inside and they cannot have babies. So they do not get a period.

Is it normal to feel shy when you have your period?

Yes, many girls feel shy because they are not used to managing their period. This is normal and as you get older, you will feel less shy.

Is it normal if ...?

Is it normal that girls get angry easily when they have their period?

Yes, the hormones that are moving in a girl's body when she has her period can cause mood swings.

Is it normal if a girl gets her period when she is young, such as ages 9, 10, or 11?

Yes, there are a wide range of ages when girls can get their periods, from 8 or 9 up until 17 or 18 years of age.

Is it normal that sometimes a girl will get clots coming out with her period?

Yes, thick clumps of blood in your period are normal and are called "clots." They are more frequent when you have been lying down, so you may see more when you wake up in the morning.

Is it normal to get pimples during your period?

Yes, many girls and women will get pimples just before or during their period.

Is it normal to get water-like or white discharge right before or after your period?

Yes, once a girl's body starts to develop, having some clear or milky-white discharge is normal. During her period, the menstrual blood can be different colours, including bright red, light pink or even more brown in colour.

Is it normal to get stomach pain during your period?

Yes, "cramps" are pains in the lower abdomen that may happen during or just before your period. Small or medium pain is normal but if the pain is very bad, you might want to see a doctor or nurse for medicine. And some girls never have pain.

Is it True or False...??

- On average, it takes 3-4 years for a girl's breasts to fully develop. **True**
- If you get married you will stop having stomach pain (cramps). **False**
- If you have sexual relations during your period you stop having pain. **False**
- You can go to school or participate in any sports during your period. **True**
- Washing your vagina with an antiseptic/disinfectant is good for your vagina. **False**
- Using sanitary pads will make you unable to have a baby. **False**
- If a girl gets her period at a young age, it is because she has been having sexual relations. **False**
- If a girl's egg is mature but she has not yet had her first period she is still able to become pregnant if she has sexual relations. **True**
- Drinking alcohol cures period pain and allows the blood to flow better. **False**
- When you grow up, you will stop having stomach pain (cramps) during your period. **False**

Puberty Changes

- Your skin makes more oils, so you may get pimples.
- Your nipples will get darker in colour.
- Your breasts will grow larger and be more sensitive.
- Hair will grow under your arms and in your 'private' part (pubic area).
- Sweat glands under your arms will be more active so you will smell more like an adult.
- Your hips will become wider/broader.
- You will grow taller more quickly than you grew before.



Keeping a menstrual calendar

To help you keep track of your period, here is an example of a calendar you can draw and use.

When you get your period:

- Each time you get your period, circle (○) the date it starts for that month, and draw an (X) through each day that the bleeding continues.

Remember, during puberty girls can have irregular periods!

January						
			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	29	30	31	

February						
						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	

March						
						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	29
30	31					

April						
			1	2	3	4
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			



Menstrual Myths... True or False?

Girls may get pimples around the time of their menstrual periods. **True**

If an animal (dog/goat) picks up your pad, you will not have children. **False**

Stress can cause you to miss a period. **True**

Eating sugary foods and drinking sugary drinks will make your period irregular. **False**

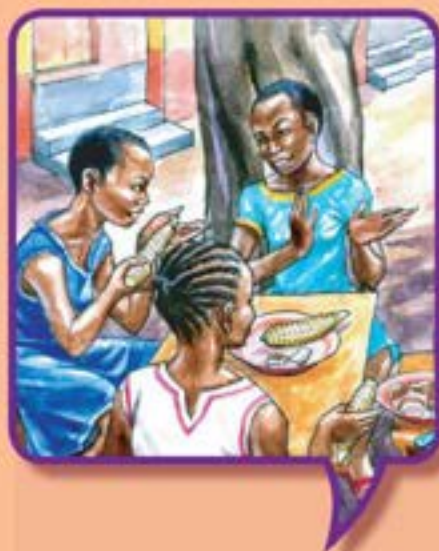
Girls need to have children shortly after getting their period because girls have a limited number of eggs and lose one each period. **False**

Congratulations!!

You have now learned about growing from a girl into a young woman.



This book tells the
stories of young
Ghanaian girls



Smart*line*

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