
A guide for teenagers and young adults

What is the menstrual cycle?

The time from the beginning of one period to the start of the next is known as your menstrual cycle.

What is a period?

A period is the time when girls bleed from their vagina. Your period can last between 2 and 7 days, but it will usually last for about 5 days. The bleeding tends to be heaviest in the first 2 days. You can start your period as early as 8 years old, but the average is around 12 years old, although many will be a lot older than this.

For most teenagers their periods happen about every 28 days. It's common for periods to be more or less frequent than this, ranging from every 23 days to every 35 days. Periods may be more irregular when you first start having them.

When your period is at its heaviest, the blood will be red. On lighter days, it may be pink or brown.

You'll lose about 20 to 90ml (about 1 to 5 tablespoons) of blood during your period, although some teenagers bleed more heavily than this.

How does my menstrual cycle and period affect my bedwetting symptoms?

During your menstrual cycle there are several hormonal changes that occur. Hormones are chemical messengers that help tell parts of the body what to do and how to work. In the female body, hormone levels of oestrogen and progesterone change throughout the month.

Just before your period starts there is a drop in oestrogen and progesterone. These hormones help control your periods, but they also work on your bladder and urethra. Your bladder stores urine (wee) and your urethra is the tube that allows urine to leave your body.

Bedwetting and Periods

The hormones change the way your body holds onto fluid. This can cause you to hold onto more water just before your period and you may need to go to the toilet more often when your period starts.

Other hormones, called prostaglandins, send messages to your uterus (womb) to help start your period. These prostaglandins also add pressure to your bladder which may make you need to pass urine more often.

If you are also experiencing night-time wetting, this extra fluid that has been held in your body can mean you produce more urine overnight and the bedwetting may get worse at this time.

What can I do to support myself when I am on my period?

Try to work at keeping your bladder healthy all the time:

- By drinking well your body understands that you have enough water and will send the messages to not hold on to as much water as you approach your period.
- Avoid caffeinated or carbonated (fizzy) drinks which act as diuretics: they encourage the body to make more urine. They can also irritate the lining of the bladder, making you want to pass urine more often. Tea, coffee hot chocolate, cola and some energy drinks contain caffeine.
- Avoid salty foods and reduce refined carbohydrates (processed or sugary foods and unhealthy snacks). These may cause you to hold more fluid in your body.
- Eat lots of green leafy vegetables especially in the week leading up to and during your period. These help fluid to move through your body well and keep the right amount of fluid in.
- Try to use the toilet at regular times during the day. Find balance by listening to your body and going to the toilet when you need too. Avoid putting off going to the toilet and avoid going to the toilet just in case (when you don't need to go but try to pass urine anyway). Talk to your school to request a toilet pass if this would help you.

Bedwetting and Periods

Other things you can do:

- Talk to your healthcare professional about any medications that you are taking. Some may make symptoms worse for some teenagers e.g. contraceptive medication, anti-depressants and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines such as ibuprofen. Do not stop taking any medicines that you have been prescribed without talking to your healthcare professional.
- Make sure you follow advice from your healthcare professional about how to manage any bedwetting.
- Always ask for a follow up appointment with your health care professional if your bed wetting symptoms are not getting better or you are struggling to follow their suggestions for treatment.

Further information

Find more information about child bladder and bowel health in our information library at www.bbuk.org.uk. You can also contact the [Bladder & Bowel UK confidential helpline](tel:01612144591) (0161 214 4591).

For further advice on bladder and bowel problems speak to your GP or other healthcare professional.

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