

periods for hope

**EDUCATIONAL
BOOKLET**

WHO ARE WE?

Periods For Hope is a non-profit organisation that focuses on addressing issues of menstruation and gender-based violence. We aim to educate about sexual and reproductive health as well as empower girls and young women to be agents of their bodies.

WHAT IS THIS?

We have created this booklet as a way to assist you with your period during the pandemic. Along with the booklet, you should have also received a reusable sanitary kit. This sanitary kit has been designed and locally produced to act as a sustainable solution to your cycle. We hope you enjoy using it for the next three years.

FIND US ONLINE:



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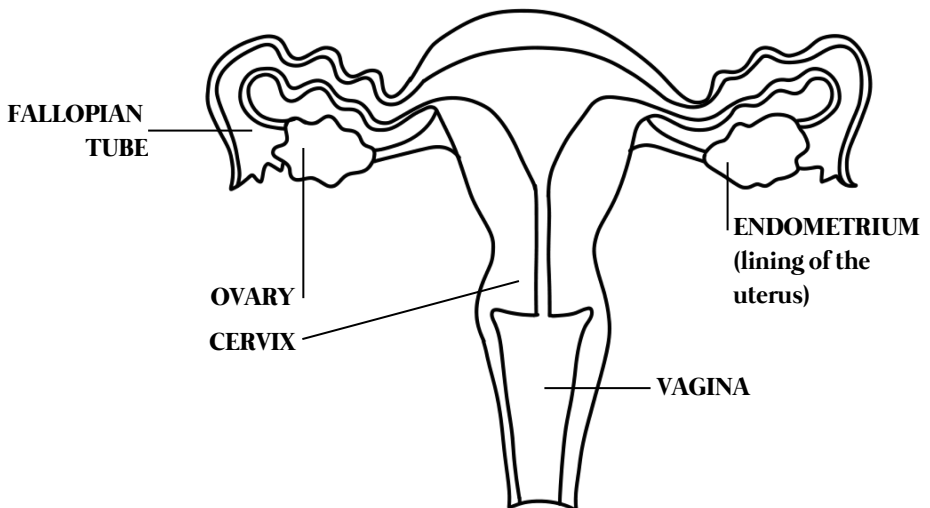
MENSTRUATION

What is menstruation?

During puberty, females begin to produce eggs in the ovaries, and males begin to produce sperm in the testes. Hair will grow in the pubic and underarm regions, and females will begin to grow breasts. Males have higher levels of testosterone, whereas females have higher levels of progesterone and oestrogen. Females start experiencing monthly cycles due to changing hormone levels. These monthly cycles are known as menstrual cycles, and consist of a period of bleeding known as menstruation, or a 'period'.

The menstrual cycle consists of four different stages:

1. An egg will begin to develop in the ovary. The lining of the uterus, called the endometrium, will start to thicken.
2. The ovary will then release the egg into the fallopian tube. The endometrium will continue to thicken to prepare for pregnancy.
3. The egg moves to the uterus, and if it is not fertilised, the endometrium will begin to break down and disintegrate.
4. The endometrium is then shed through the vagina as blood, tissue and mucous. This is a 'period', which is the bleeding phase of the menstrual cycle, and will usually last between 2 - 7 days.



When women have their period, it is normal to feel:

- Stomach cramps
- Nauseous or faint
- Sore and tender breasts
- Headaches and tiredness
- General discomfort
- Emotional and psychological changes such as sadness, irritability or anger. This is due to changing hormones.

Is there such a thing as abnormal bleeding?

Abnormal uterine bleeding is a set of symptoms that may include: no bleeding/absent period; irregular periods; vaginal bleeding between cycles; heavy bleeding that lasts longer than eight days. If you experience these symptoms, it is a good idea to seek professional advice.

Reasons for having abnormal periods:

- Stress and inadequate food intake
- Use of specific medication (including contraception)
- First two years after girls and women start their periods
- During pregnancy
- During frequent breastfeeding
- Menopause

What is PMS?

PMS refers to 'Premenstrual Syndrome', and consists of normal physical and emotional symptoms experienced leading up to a period. These symptoms differ for everyone and can also change throughout life.

Symptoms may include:

- Swollen or sensitive breasts
- Headache or backache
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Bloating and cramps
- Irritable
- Feeling tired
- Problems sleeping
- Changes in appetite

Did you know?
PMS is normal with over 90% of women experiencing it.

PERIOD MANAGEMENT

It is essential that you are able to manage your period appropriately. This is to prevent any infections and also makes the menstrual cycle easier to cope with monthly.

Friends and Family

You may feel scared the first time you receive your period, so it is important that you receive guidance and support from your family members. Try approaching a family member or friend you trust when first getting your period or any time after that.



Did you know? Between 20 and 40 mL of blood will be lost during each cycle (about three tablespoons).

Sanitary Products

The choice of sanitary protection is a personal decision based on what you think is acceptable and what works best for you. Some options that girls and women use during their period include:

- Natural materials (like dung or leaves)
- Strips of cloth
- Tampons (with or without applicators)
- Disposable pads
- Menstrual cups or menstrual sponges
- Reusable Pads



Hygiene

Hygiene is an essential aspect of menstruation management. Ensure to do the following when managing your period:

- Wash genitals with clean water every day
- Pat the area dry and put a fresh cloth pad, cotton or tissue on your underwear
- Keep unused cloths and pads clean (wrapped in tissue or plastic bag) to use later
- Be prepared: keep spare cloths or pads in case you get your period during the day or at school.
- Remember: during menstruation, you can do everything that you usually do including, daily baths or showers, exercising and playing sports, daily routine, work and attending school.

Did you know? It is false that women and girls cannot bath or swim while on their period. If accessible, tampons, cups and sponges are ideal for managing a period while swimming.

Physical Well-being

It is vital to ensure you look after your body during menstruation. If possible, ensure to eat healthily and sleep well. If you experience pain during your period, try to reduce this pain by doing the following:

- Placing a hot water bottle on the lower stomach area
- Taking a warm bath or drinking a hot beverage
- Taking a walk, stretching and/or exercising
- Rubbing or massaging the lower stomach area.
- Eating foods that are high in magnesium and iron is important to reduce cramps and prevent iron deficiency.

Did you know? Sometimes period pain or cramps (also known as Dysmenorrhea) that are very intense can signal a problem. If you experience pain that occurs earlier in your cycle and lasts longer than normal period cramps, then it may be necessary to seek medical advice.

THE PFH SANITARY KIT

The SafePad package contains 3 super day pads (for lighter flow), 1 night pad (for heavier flow) and a storage bag. The sides of each pad (lined with a waterproof shield) clip together over the lining of the panty, in the same position of a normal pad.

To clean the used pads, soak in cold water for 30 minutes with soap, rinse, and then dry well. They can also be washed in a machine. The pads are made with a special anti-microbial material, and will last for up to 5 years.

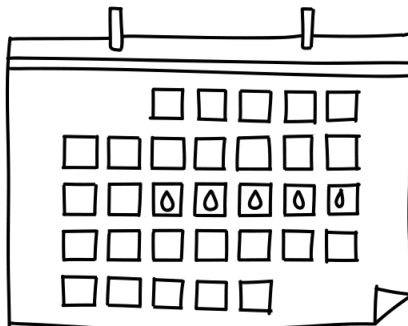


TRACKING YOUR PERIOD

We have added a cycle tracker to your kit. It is important to track your period so that you are aware of what is happening during your cycle and so that you can predict future periods.

Below explains how to track your period:

- Begin by marking down the first day your period starts and when it stops.
- Throughout the duration of your period, mark down the spotting [S] as well as indicate on your calendar if bleeding is:
 - **Very light [O]**
 - **Heavy [+]**
 - **Normal [X]**
- To figure out the “length” of your cycle, begin counting on the first day of bleeding (which is also called cycle day 1) until the first day of your next period.
- The average menstrual cycle is about 28 days, but this can vary between women and girls.
- Keep a separate notebook to record any feelings and symptoms (such as headaches and backache) that you may have during your period or cycle. Also include a rating of your day (good, bad or average).



THE TROUBLE WITH GENDER

After having learned about menstruation and understanding the biological characteristics behind being 'female', we can now begin to focus on gender, sex and sexuality.

Did you know? 'Sex' refers to the biological characteristics of being female or male. 'Gender' refers to the roles and attributes assigned to people by society based on their sex. The difference between sexes is based on nature, while differences based on gender are nurture.

Gender Roles

As stated above, 'gender' is a social construct which means that these roles are based on cultural and social norms and beliefs. Some of these roles might seem as if they link to biological differences, such as a mother taking care of children, but they are not.

Gender roles can have a significant influence on girls and women too, especially while menstruating. It can lead to the exclusion of women and girls from social opportunities, such as education and employment. It can also cause an unequal burden of responsibilities such as more household work. Practices like gender-based violence (GBV) are also linked to gender roles.



What is Gender-Based Violence?

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to the psychological, emotional, sexual or economic violence that occurs as a result of unequal power relationships between genders in society. It occurs because of perceived ideas of gender roles, norms and expectations.

There are various forms of GBV:

- Violence against women and girls (VAWG)
 - Violence that is directed specifically onto women and girls.
- Violence against LGBTQI+ people
 - Violence directed onto people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or intersex people
- Intimate partner violence (IPV)
 - Physical, emotional and sexual violence by a partner.
- Domestic violence (DV)
 - Physical, emotional and sexual violence by a family member. This violence could be sexual assault, coercion and sexual harassment.
- Sexual violence (SV)
 - Various sexual acts that are unwanted or forced upon someone else. This may involve rape, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation or sex trafficking.

Impact of GBV

Gender-based violence is detrimental to a victim's life - meaning that it results in effects that are physical, behavioural and psychological.

The effects of GBV include:

Physical

- HIV/AIDS and/or Sexually Transmitted Infections
- Unwanted pregnancies
- Miscarriages
- Injury and/or death

Behavioural

- Low self-esteem, shame and guilt
- Substance abuse
- Living in fear
- Suicidal ideations

Psychological

- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety and depressive disorders
- Shock and fear
- Complex trauma

Did you know? 'Complex Trauma' refers to the exposure to various and multiple traumatic events.



SEXUAL HARASSMENT

What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is a form of 'gender-based violence' and is defined as unwanted sexual behaviour from another person that is both psychologically and physically harmful.

Examples of sexual harassment

- Making sexual propositions, such as, "How about it, babe?"
- Spreading rumours like, "She'll do it with anyone."
- Sending unsolicited sexual messages or pictures to a cellphone.
- Chasing and/or cornering women and girls to grab and kiss them, flip-up their skirts.
- Persistent unwelcome sexual advances.

How do we define sexual harassment?

The most important aspect of defining sexual harassment is how behaviour makes the victim feel. If the sexual act makes the victim feel uncomfortable and fearful, then it can constitute sexual harassment.

The intention of sexual harassment is where one person often harasses to exert their power over another. This is aimed to make the victim feel insulted, intimidated and threatened. This is why it is vital that people feel safe in their relationships and to be able to set boundaries when they do not want to do certain things.



RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

What is a healthy relationship?

A healthy relationship forms on three basic principles; freedom, love and respect.

Freedom

A healthy relationship allows both people to see their family and friends, go out with other people, make their own decisions, follow their own set of beliefs, religion or practises and be themselves.

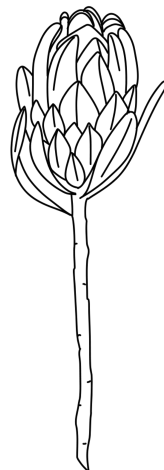
Love

A healthy relationship is not abusive. It allows the two people to communicate with respect and honesty and two people feel safe in the relationship. People in healthy relationships have boundaries and can say 'NO' to things they do not want to do, such as sexual intercourse or risky activities.

Respect

A healthy relationship has its grounding in respect where two people can listen to each other's feelings and opinions, can celebrate achievements, are not jealous, do not insult or abuse each other and do not control or manipulate each other.

All relationships can go through a hard time and we can disagree and feel unhappy in relationships that are not abusive. This makes it difficult to understand what is normal and not abusive.



Warning signs of an abusive relationship:

- Try to control you
- Pressure you
- Deliberately hurt you
- Express extreme jealousy
- Break you down and threatens you

Another important aspect of healthy relationships is the notion of 'consent'.

What is consent?

Consent is a mutual agreement based on a shared desire for sexual activities. It is an ongoing verbal interaction that involves honesty, respect and trust. Important to note: consent is not related to power or coercing the other person into saying 'yes' to sexual activity.

What consent does look like:

- Communicating at all times and checking that either partner is comfortable.
- Respecting when a partner says "no" or "maybe".
- Not making comments or acting aggressively to coerce someone into saying "yes".

What consent does NOT look like:

- Assuming certain clothes or flirting is giving consent
- Giving consent under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Giving consent because someone is pressured.



SEEKING HELP

As mentioned earlier, sexual harassment and other forms of GBV have a detrimental impact on the victim. Due to this, it is vital that you know what to do in case you or someone you care about experiences it. It is also important to remember that there is no 'right' way to handle sexual harassment because each situation is unique.

If you are being harassed:

DON'T BLAME YOURSELF

If you are being harassed, do not ever blame yourself despite what the perpetrator says. Under no circumstance is anyone allowed to sexually harass someone else - it is illegal and is never the victim's fault.

REPORT

Although reporting sexual harassment may cause feelings of fear and bewilderment, it is always best to report sexual harassment to an adult or health professional that you trust. If someone does not believe you at first, you may have to approach someone else. In most cases, it is better to tell someone sooner rather than later otherwise the sexual harassment and its impact may worsen.

KEEP RECORD

Keep a record of all events that have happened to you in a journal. Save any offensive pictures, texts, etc, so that you have evidence of the sexual harassment.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE

It is always vital to seek medical care immediately after a traumatic event has happened, especially if it involves rape. This is because rape may require medical attention in terms of a physical examination. In cases of recurring events and/or single events, it is also important that once you have reported the incidence(s), you seek psychological and professional help. This is because being sexually harassed has a detrimental impact on your mental health too.

If someone you know is being harassed:

LISTEN and BELIEVE

Hear what your friend has to say and try not to interrupt. Let them talk at their own pace. Show them that you are listening by making eye contact and nodding. Try not to overdo the questions, as this can make it seem like you doubt them.

VALIDATE

Let your friend know you think their feelings are real and normal by repeating the word they've used to describe their feeling (e.g. 'it's OK that you feel scared').

DON'T BLAME

In our society, it's common for victims to be blamed for their experience of violence. Try to avoid questions such as 'Why did you go there?' and 'Why did you go out with them?' because this may make your friend think they're responsible for what happened to them.

ASK

If you feel a bit helpless, ask your friend what sort of help they'd like from you. They're not expecting you to solve the problem, and you've already helped just by listening. Asking will also help your friend think about what to do next.

CONFIDENTIALITY

It is important that your friend trusts you and feels like they're in control of the story. If you think someone else needs to know (e.g. a trusted adult or the police), first ask your friend for permission to discuss this with a third person.

GET HELP

Talk with your friend about what would help stop the violence (if it is still happening), or what they feel they want. Encourage your friend to tell a trusted adult who can do something about it, such as a relative, a school counsellor or the police.

WRITE ABOUT YOUR PERIOD

You can use this space to write about your period, such as the symptoms or emotions experienced during your cycle.

A large grid of small dots for writing, covering the majority of the page below the introductory text. The dots are arranged in a regular, repeating pattern.

HAPPY THOUGHTS

Write any negative thoughts you have about yourself and then rewrite them in a more positive way.

A large grid of small dots for writing, covering the majority of the page below the instructions. The dots are arranged in a regular, repeating pattern, providing a guide for handwriting or a space for free writing.

REFERENCES

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- Periods For Hope. Life Orientation Classroom. 2020. South African History Online.
- SaferSpaces. 2020. Gender-Based Violence in South Africa.
- Samavi, n.d. Menstrual Health – Training Manual.
- Sexual Harassment & Rape Prevention Program (SHARPP). 2020. Rape Culture.
- The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2016. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) In South Africa: A Brief Review.
- White Ribbon Australia. Understanding The Issue.
- 1800RESPECT. 2020. Healthy Relationships.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Childline South Africa**
Toll-free helpline: 0800 055 555
Website: www.childline.org.za
- **Sonke Gender Justice (Whistleblower)**
Tel: 0800 333 059
SMS: 33490
Email: sonke@whistleblowing.co.za
- **The Trauma Centre**
Tel: 021 465 7373
Email: info@trauma.co.za
- **Rape Crisis**
Tel: 021 684 1180
Email: info@rapecrisis.org.za
- **1000 Women 1 Voice**
Tel: 071 776 4851
Email: info@1000women.co.za
Website: www.1000women.co.za