

LESSON 4: PERIOD PRODUCTS

Overview: Pupils get messy with different types of period product

Great For: Exploring the variety of period products available

Resources Needed:	See list below
Prep Time Needed:	15 mins
Works best in:	Classroom or science lab – this will get messy(!)
Number of participants:	Full Class
Time Needed:	80 minutes – best done as one long lesson rather than in two halves
Set Up:	See below. Familiarise yourself with reusable period products before you start.

Age 10+

Learning Outcomes:

Pupils understand the changes of puberty for male and female bodies, that some people get periods and that this is normal. Pupils know and can describe how to prepare for and manage periods.

Who is this for: *This is a good activity for students who already have a good grounding in the physical and emotional changes that come with puberty and a basic understanding of what a period is. This can be covered with What Are Periods (Lesson 3), which is best done in P6/Y5 but will also work for P7/Y6.*

Resources:

Each group will need:

- A beaker and/or measuring jug
- A 'squeeze sauce bottle'
- 'Blood' – a mix of black current squash and tomato sauce works well; or tomato juice
- One disposable pad per pupil – take them out of the packaging so they are not branded. (Please ensure a variety of brands, mix of wings /no wings, day /night, different absorbencies)
- One tampon per pupil – take them out of the packaging so they are not branded. (Please ensure a variety of brands, mix of applicator (plastic and cardboard), non-applicator; different absorbencies)
- [If possible] One menstrual cup, one reusable pad, and one pair of period pants per group

NB: This lesson requires a lot of resources, but most of them can be reused with every class. Disposable products can be found inexpensively in pound shops or by using supermarket own brands. It is important to buy a range of brands so that pupils can see the variety of products available on the market. This is a hands-on, fun exercise that is worth doing if possible – especially with male pupils, who are otherwise unlikely to be given an opportunity to touch or see period products

LESSON 4: PERIOD PRODUCTS

Set Up

Make some blood – mix black current squash and tomato sauce and stir well.

Pour some blood into each squeeze bottle

Take period products out of their boxes/packaging, and put into two large bags so you have a mix of single-wrapped pads in one bag, and a mix of individually wrapped tampons in another. This way they are unbranded

Introduction

5 minutes

Introduce the topic to the class.
Establish ground rules (see Teachers' Guide)
Remind the class that periods can be a sensitive topic

Starter Activity

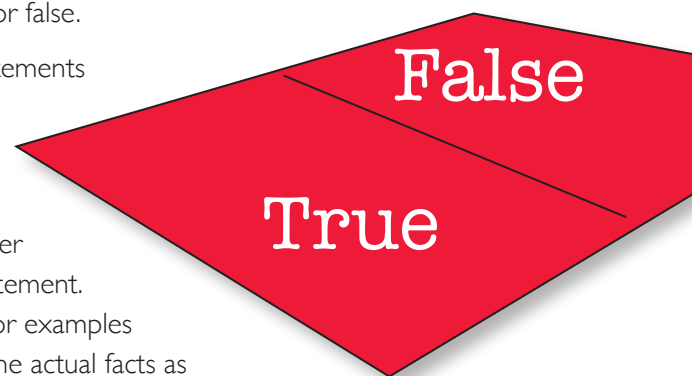
15 minutes

This starter is the same as Activity 1 – True or False using the period statements
Explain that we will be exploring some true or false statements about periods

Ask the class to stand up and draw an invisible line between one side of the room (true) and the other side (false). Explain that anywhere in the middle along the line could be true or false.

Explain you will be reading out a set of statements and asking the class to move to either the "true" side or the "false" side

Read out the statements below (see page 4), asking the students to move to whichever place they think is appropriate for each statement.
Each time once everyone has moved ask for examples of reasoning and if the class agrees, giving the actual facts as necessary (explanations are given for teacher reference)



Main Activity

50 minutes

Explain that today we will be exploring the products available to people on their periods.

The following activities are messy. We encourage pupils to have fun, and welcome jokes / laughter as long as they are positive and don't disrupt the learning of others.

Take pupils through the following practical activities (see full instructions on pages 5-8).

Part 1: Blood Loss

Part 2: Disposable Pads

Part 3: Tampons

Part 4: Reusable Products

Allow time for questions before clearing up

Remind pupils that disposable products should never be flushed down the toilet – they clog the water ways and may end up in the ocean.

LESSON 4: PERIOD PRODUCTS

Plenary

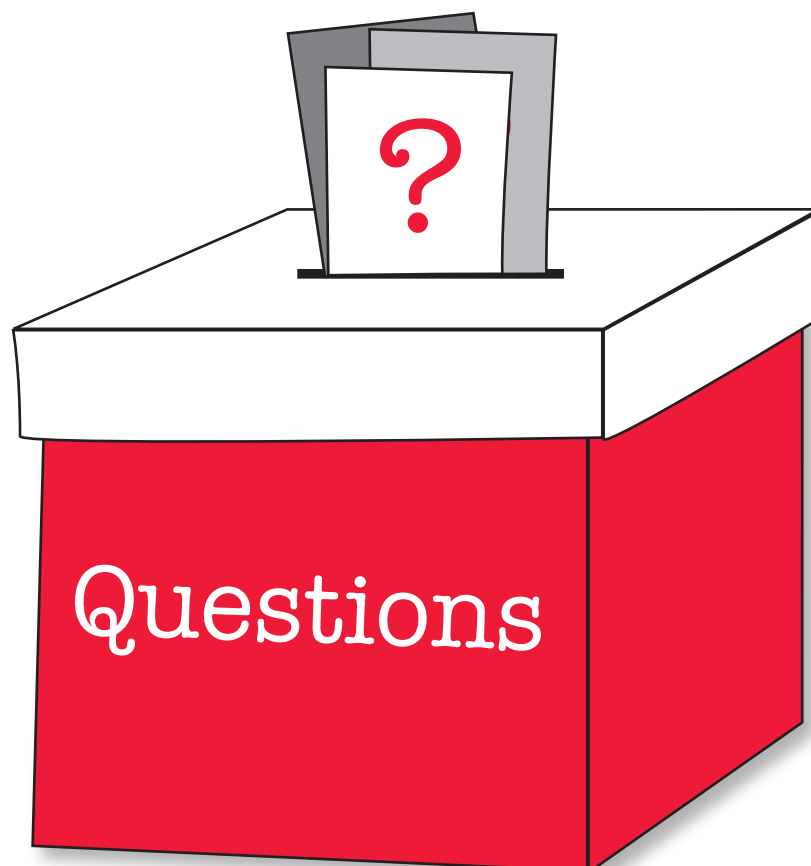
10 minutes

Explain that one of the confusing things about female puberty can be not knowing when periods will start. You may have recently covered this if you have just done Lesson 3. Explain there are several clear signs that periods may be on their way & that it's a good idea to be prepared:

- Breast buds (around 2 years before first period)
- Pubic and underarm hair
- Vaginal discharge (at least 6 months before, can be much longer)
- Mood swings
- Body shape changes
- Growth spurts
- Acne and body odour

Suggest to female pupils that they may want to speak to their parents about putting together a period kit with pads, spare underwear and tissues to carry around in their schoolbag. If you provide period products at school, make sure pupils know where to get them.

Finally, share a question box and explain that this box will be in the room and that pupils can put questions in to be answered anonymously. Ensure you answer questions in subsequent lessons. Reassure pupils that they can speak to any member of staff about puberty if they have any questions.



LESSON 4: STARTER ACTIVITY

Read each statement aloud and ask pupils to decide whether it is True or False.
Answers are provided in below statements.

TRUE OR FALSE: PERIOD PRODUCTS

A period is when someone pees blood.

FALSE: period blood does not come from the urethra (pee tube). It is part of a separate bodily system and comes from the womb, leaving the body through vagina. Remind pupils that female bodies have three holes

A period is when someone loses a lot of blood each month.

FALSE: the average blood loss is around 1-2 egg cups full but it can look like more.
If someone is losing a lot of blood they should see their doctor.

A period is the name for shedding the lining of the womb. TRUE

A period always comes every 28 days.

COULD BE TRUE OR FALSE: the average cycle is around 25-35 days –
it will be different for everyone

The start of a period is Day 1 of the menstrual cycle. TRUE

A period is made up of blood alone.

FALSE: period blood is a mixture of tissue, blood & mucus

A period always lasts for 5 days.

FALSE: period length varies from person to person, it normally lasts between 3-7 days

You can hold in a period like you can hold in a wee.

FALSE: the muscles in the vagina are not like the muscles in the urethra, you cannot stop or start period flow at will, it just drips out. This is why period products are used

Period flow is always bright red

COULD BE TRUE OR FALSE: period flow can vary
in colour from brown to bright or very dark red.
It may depend on the day of your cycle

**Most people with a female body have periods
between the ages of around 12-55.**

TRUE: there is variation in ages but most
biological females will have regular periods
between menarche and menopause

**Periods are natural and a normal part of growing
up for anyone with a female body TRUE**

All period products are thrown away after use

FALSE: some period products are disposable (used
once and thrown away) and some are reusable
(used, washed and used again many times).



LESSON 4: WET ACTIVITIES: HOW TO

PART 1: BLOOD LOSS

Begin by making sure that each group has a squeeze bottle full of 'blood'. Either allow pupils to mix their own, or hand out pre-prepared blood which will save time (and mess!)

At the front of the class, ask pupils how much blood they think someone loses while on their period. Ask each group to squeeze out how much blood they think is lost from their bottle to their empty beaker

At the front of the class, show pupils how much blood is actually lost. Most people lose between one and two eggcups full of blood – 30-60ml. This figure is confusing as it doesn't take into account everything else that comes out as part of menstrual flow including cervical mucus, clots, uterine lining and other tissue. By some accounts blood makes up only 30-40% of menstrual flow, so people should not be surprised if it looks more like 100ml.

As you explain this, pour out all three amounts (30ml, 60ml and 100ml) for comparison. There has been remarkably little research on this topic, so it's a grey area. No human is the same so flow can vary considerably. Ask pupils whether this seems like a lot or a little.



KEY POINT

Anyone experiencing very heavy bleeding (menorrhagia) should see a doctor. This is defined as 80ml of blood (so 200+ml in total). Or, in practice, someone who:

- soaks through more than one tampon, pad, or cup per hour for several hours
- needs to use double protection to prevent leaks
- bleeds for longer than seven days
- passes blood clots larger than a 10p piece
- has to restrict daily activities because of their period
- experiences signs of anaemia

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LESSON 4: WET ACTIVITIES: HOW TO

PART 2: DISPOSABLE PADS

Show the class a disposable pad and explain how it works (see info on page 9).

Unwrap it and show the sticky strip which attaches it to underwear. Point out the wings.

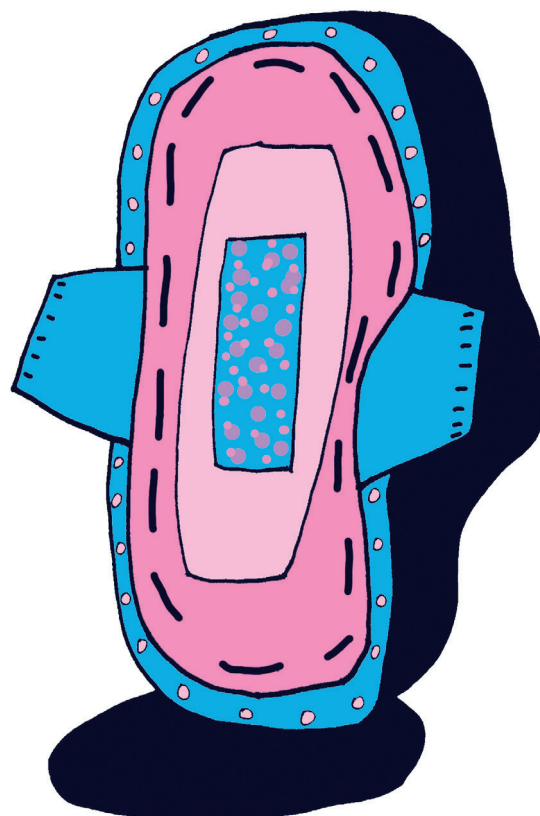
Hand out one disposable pad to each pupil. Try and ensure that for each table or group, pupils have a range of different brands / sizes to compare with their neighbours.

Ask pupils to unwrap the pad and stick it to their desk.

Ask pupils to compare their pad to those of their neighbours. Ask them to think about size, length, softness, design etc. Encourage pupils to touch, feel (and smell!) their pads (some are fragranced).

At the front of the class demonstrate dripping blood onto a pad. Talk about how period blood does not flow out like having a pee, it drips out slowly a bit at a time.

Allow pupils to experiment play with adding blood to their pad. Ask pupils to slowly drip blood onto the pad (using a squeezezy sauce bottle) until just before it is saturated. They will need to wait a little while it is absorbed.



NB: There is likely to be a lot of giggling and mess. This is ok, in fact it is encouraged. It's really important that all pupils, including boys, get to play with period products so they feel more normal and less scary.

LESSON 4: WET ACTIVITIES: HOW TO

PART 3: TAMPONS

Show the class a tampon and explain how it works (see info on page 9). Show the difference between an applicator tampon and a non-applicator tampon. Explain how to insert one. Talk about Toxic Shock Syndrome – highlight this is a very rare illness that is nothing to worry about provided you never wear a tampon for more than 8 hours - 6 is safer (see below).

Answer any questions about tampons that arise at this point

Hand out one tampon to each pupil. Try and ensure that for each table or group, pupils have a range of different brands / sizes / applicators to compare with their neighbours

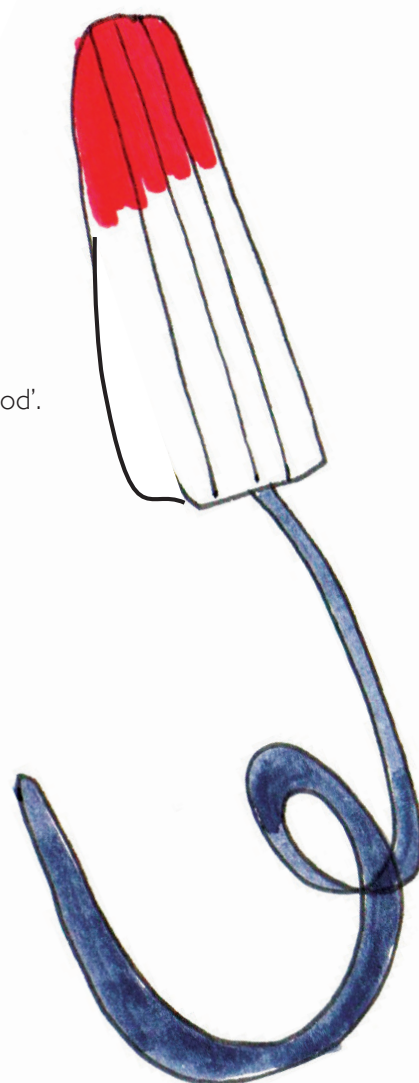
Ask pupils to unwrap the tampon and compare it to those of their neighbours. Ask them to think about size, and shape as well as the different applicators. Encourage pupils to play with their tampons – pupils may be nervous at first, but it's important that pupils of all genders feel comfortable with products.

At the front of the class, using a squeeze bottle or a syringe, demonstrate blood dripping onto the top of a tampon. After a few drips it will begin to resemble a tampon as it might look after you have removed it. Also show pupils what happens when you dip a tampon in a beaker of liquid (it will expand considerably). Point out to pupils that they are unlikely to bleed a beaker full of water, so fully saturated tampons are not real to life.

Allow pupils to experiment with their tampons and 'blood'.

KEY POINT

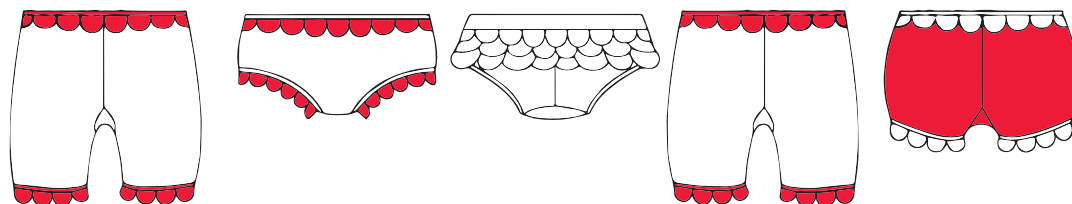
Many people flush pads, tampons, applicators or wrappers down the toilet out of shame and embarrassment. Remind pupils to always put products in the bin provided and if there is no bin in the cubicle, wrap them in loo roll and take them to the nearest bin. This is totally normal.



LESSON 4: WET ACTIVITIES: HOW TO

PART 4: REUSABLE PRODUCTS - MENSTRUAL CUPS, REUSABLE PADS AND PERIOD PANTS

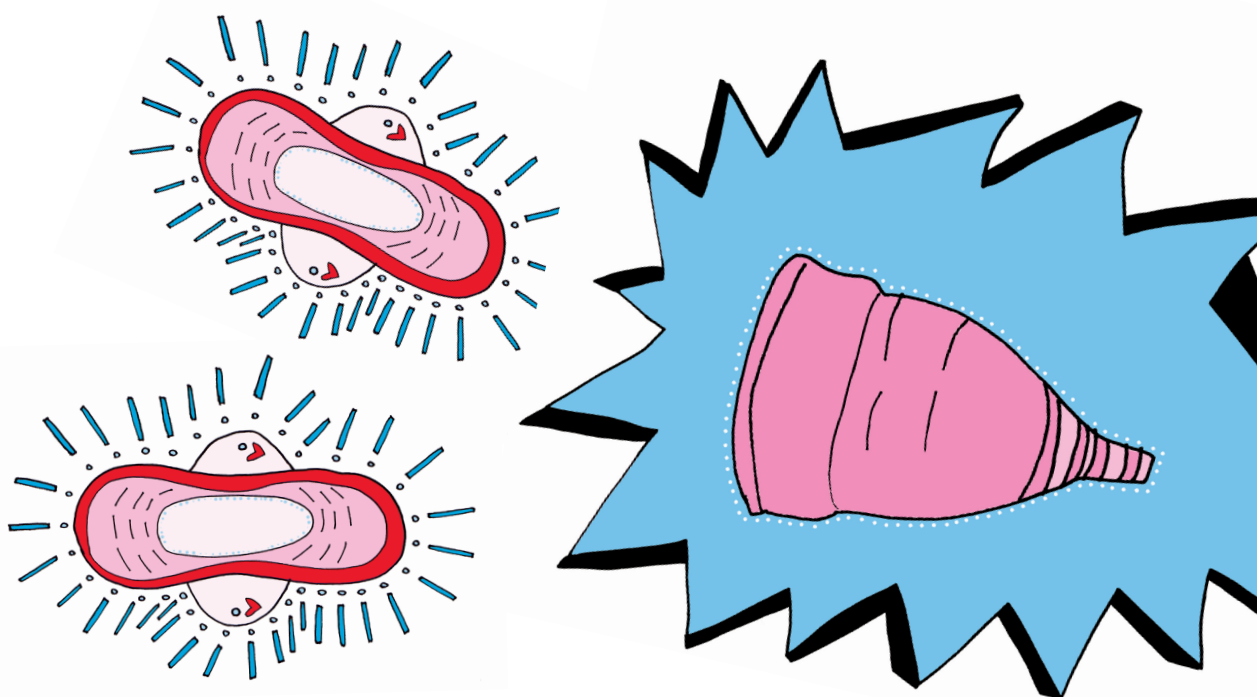
If available, show pupils an example of each of these products. If you do not have access to the products themselves, don't worry, but please do ensure that you tell pupils that they exist. Show photographs if possible. Talk through how they are used (see info on page 10) and allow pupils to touch and feel each product.



KEY POINT

There are a huge range of products available to people on their period. Everyone is different and people will choose products that suit them best. Almost everyone starts their period by using pads – moving on to tampons and other products when they get a bit older. Tampons and Cups can be difficult to insert, and no one needs to feel worried about them – they are there when people are ready.

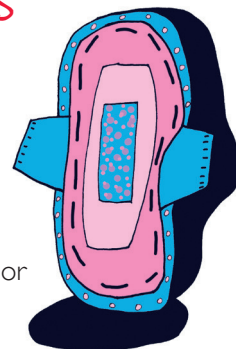
For very good environmental reasons, many people support the increased uptake of reusable products in the UK - or at least the purchase of non-plastic disposable products. For some lower income households this is not a viable option. Not everyone has access to the same financial resources or has the appropriate washing facilities at home



LESSON 4: INFO FOR TEACHERS

DISPOSABLE PRODUCTS

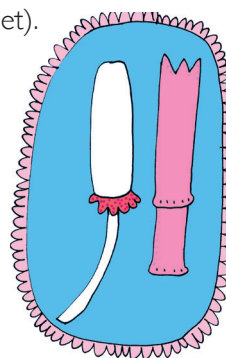
Disposable Pads come in many shapes and sizes, with different absorbencies. Encourage pupils to try out different options. They are made of different materials – cotton, or corn-fibre pads are available, but many mainstream brands are manufactured with plastic. Some pads are bleached or fragranced which can cause irritation.



Pads stick inside your underwear and some have wings to make them more secure. People often wear longer, bigger pads at night and just after they have had a baby.

Change your pad every three to six hours. Wrap them in tissue, an empty wrapper or a disposal bag and then pop them in the bin (not down the toilet).

Tampons sit inside the vagina and are more convenient for swimming and other exercise than pads. They come in different absorbances for light to heavy flow - mini, regular, super and super plus. Some are inserted into the vagina with your finger and others come with applicators, made from either cardboard or plastic. These are inserted into the vagina and the applicator end is pushed to insert the tampon, then the applicator is pulled away leaving the tampon inside. Some applicators come ready to use, others need a quick pull to activate them. All the wrappers, applicators and the tampons themselves must be disposed of in a bin and never down the toilet.



Tampons come with instruction leaflets with diagrams of how to insert them. It takes a bit of practice! If you're unsure of how long to leave the tampon in at first, each time you go to the toilet give the string a gentle tug. If the tampon slides out easily and is completely soaked in blood it's time to change. If it doesn't move, it's probably not fully absorbed and so can be left in a bit longer, and may be painful to remove if it is still dry. Also keep an eye on the string each time you go to the toilet, if you can see red at the top of the string near your vulva it's definitely time to change or you may risk leaking.

Most tampon manufacturers state their tampons can be left in for up to 8 hours, but changing a tampon every 3 to 6 hours is best, to avoid risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS). Always use the lowest absorbency for your flow.

Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) is a rare but serious illness. It is a bacterial infection associated with the use of tampons. Many young people worry about using tampons because of TSS. Reassure them that the chances of infection are very small, but also reiterate advice to always use the lowest absorbency for your flow and change them at least every 8 hours.

KEY POINT

Many people flush pads, tampons, applicators or wrappers down the toilet out of shame and embarrassment. Remind people to always put products in the bin provided and if there is no bin in the cubicle, wrap them in loo roll and take them to the nearest bin. This is totally normal.

LESSON 4: INFO FOR TEACHERS

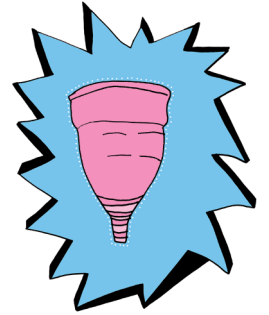
REUSABLE PRODUCTS

Menstrual cups are bell-shaped devices that sit inside the vagina (like a tampon) and collect period flow. Until recently, they have been relatively unknown, despite being invented in 1937.

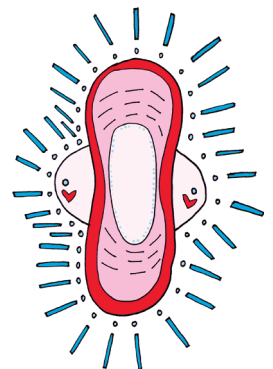
Cups are made from silicon, and are folded to insert into the vagina. They form a light suction with the vaginal walls holding them in place, before being emptied and reinserted. Many people find them more comfortable than tampons, and they are suitable for a range of activities (including swimming).

Cups can be worn for up to 12 hours – they hold more blood than a tampon, and cause less vaginal dryness than tampons. There is also less risk of TSS. Cups should be rinsed or wiped between each use, and sterilised at the end of each period.

The upfront cost of cups is higher than other products, but they can be used for up to ten years, presenting large environmental benefits. There is lots of information and support online about using menstrual cups, including choosing the right one for you and guidance on cleaning and usage.



Washable pads are available in different sizes, styles and absorbencies. Most have wings, with poppers that fasten around the gusset of underwear. They are slightly thicker than most disposable pads as they don't have the gel inside but instead rely on absorbing the blood in their material layers. People often find them more comfortable than disposable pads as they are softer, more like the material of underwear. They can be made of cotton, fleece or bamboo, and it is possible to make your own! Change them as often as you'd change a disposable pad and soak or rinse them in cold water before putting them in your normal wash. If you want to use them out and about, they often come with a small waterproof bag that will keep them safe till you get home and can rinse or soak them.



Period pants are like normal underwear but are made of special absorbent fabric. Period pants come in a range of shapes and styles, including boxer shorts. Depending on the type, they can last up to 8 hours. After use, soak them in cold water before popping in with your normal wash.

