

ACTIVITY 3: WHAT IS NORMAL?

Overview: Students sort through statements to decide what is a normal experience of periods

Great For: Starting a conversation about menstrual health; encouraging pupils to recognise potential problems; boosting body confidence

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Resources Needed: | Pre-prepared piles of statements (see overleaf) |
| Prep Time Needed: | 5 mins |
| Works best in: | Classroom |
| Number of participants: | Full Class divided into small groups |
| Time Needed: | 20 mins |
| Set Up: | Print and cut statements (pages 3-7 of this document) |

All ages

Learning Outcomes:

Pupils understand the physical and emotional changes of puberty for male and female bodies, that some people get periods and that this is normal; Pupils understand that there are many myths and taboos associated with periods and how to use facts to form their own opinions

Activity: Each group (of 2-5 pupils) is given a set of statements and is asked to sort them into piles – Normal; Not Normal and Not Sure. Working in small groups, students are encouraged to discuss and then feed in to a wider class discussion. You should go through each statement with the full class (see answers on page 8-10). Explain why something is or isn't normal, and the appropriate action if they encounter something 'not normal' themselves.

Tip: As part of this discussion, you may touch on some of the many medical conditions associated with periods. It is worth being aware of:

- **Endometriosis** – affects 1 in 10 women in the UK and causes chronic pain. Adenomyosis and Fibroids also cause severe menstrual pain
- **Menorrhagia** - very heavy menstrual bleeding
- **Pre-menstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)** – a particularly severe and distressing form of pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS). Mood symptoms are very pronounced, and can include anxiety, depression, irritability, severe mood swings, difficulty concentrating and fatigue
- **Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS)** – can cause very irregular periods, excess facial or body hair, acne and weight gain, along with irregular or missing ovulation

See *Related Medical Conditions* PDF for further details.

ACTIVITY 3: WHAT IS NORMAL?

KEY POINT

For a long time, people with period-related health issues have found it difficult to seek help – partly because they are unaware of what is normal. Everyone experiences pain differently, but if periods have a significant negative impact on someone's life then there is something wrong. Anyone suffering from severe pain that isn't helped with painkillers, very heavy bleeding, cyclical depression and/or anxiety, irregular cycles, and irregular bleeding between periods should seek help. Treatments vary depending on the person and the condition.

STATEMENTS FOR WHAT IS NORMAL?

The following gives an overview of the statements used for this exercise. Print and cut the boxes on pages 3-7 depending on the age of your pupils.

For older years you may choose to incorporate statements from younger years. Answers for teachers are found on pages 8-10.

AGE 11-13

- Starting your period after your friends do
- Being scared to use a tampon
- Talking to your friends about your period
- Leaking blood on your clothes during a period
- Brown period blood
- Being angry a few days before your period starts
- Going swimming on your period
- Having a bath on your period
- Having a period about every 25-35 days

AGE 13-15 (plus Age 11-13)

- Having labia that dangle down
- Cloudy stretchy discharge about 10 days after your period
- Waxing your pubic hair
- Having really irregular periods
- Talking to your dad about periods
- Having a heavy flow for the first couple of days
- Feeling really depressed and anxious each month
- Dark red blobs in your period blood
- Such bad cramps that you faint or pass out
- Having a sore back on the first day of your period
- Being angry a few days before your period starts
- Having a period about every 25-35 days
- Leaking blood on your clothes during a period
- Finding green discharge in your pants
- Brown period blood
- Needing to change your period product every hour
- Not starting your period until you are 16 years old
- Using a menstrual cup
- Wrapping a tampon in loo roll and hiding it up your sleeve until you find a bin
- Feeling itchy around your vulva

AGE 15+

- (plus Age 11-13 & Age 13-15)
- Having sex on your period
- Talking to your boy/girlfriend about your period
- Finding your cycle changes if you take different contraceptives
- Going on the pill to stop your periods

Print and cut the following statements creating one set for each group of pupils.

STARTING
YOUR PERIOD
AFTER YOUR
FRIENDS DO

BEING
SCARED
TO USE A
TAMPON

TALKING
TO YOUR
FRIENDS
ABOUT YOUR
PERIOD

LEAKING
BLOOD
ON YOUR
CLOTHES
DURING A
PERIOD

BROWN
PERIOD
BLOOD

BEING ANGRY
A FEW DAYS
BEFORE
YOUR PERIOD
STARTS

GOING
SWIMMING
ON YOUR
PERIOD

HAVING A
BATH ON
YOUR
PERIOD

HAVING A
PERIOD
ABOUT
EVERY
25-35 DAYS

Print and cut the following statements creating one set for each group of pupils.

HAVING LABIA
THAT DANGLE
DOWN

CLOUDY
STRETCHY
DISCHARGE
ABOUT 10
DAYS AFTER
YOUR PERIOD

WAXING YOUR
PUBIC HAIR

HAVING
REALLY
IRREGULAR
PERIODS

TALKING
TO YOUR
DAD ABOUT
PERIODS

HAVING
A HEAVY
FLOW FOR
THE FIRST
COUPLE OF
DAYS

FEELING
REALLY
DEPRESSED
AND ANXIOUS
EACH MONTH

DARK RED
BLOBS IN
YOUR PERIOD
BLOOD

SUCH BAD
CRAMPS
THAT YOU
FAINT OR
PASS OUT

Print and cut the following statements creating one set for each group of pupils.

HAVING A
SORE BACK
ON THE
FIRST DAY
OF YOUR
PERIOD

BEING ANGRY
A FEW DAYS
BEFORE
YOUR PERIOD
STARTS

HAVING A
PERIOD
ABOUT EVERY
25-35 DAYS

LEAKING
BLOOD
ON YOUR
CLOTHES
DURING A
PERIOD

FINDING
GREEN
DISCHARGE
IN YOUR
PANTS

BROWN
PERIOD
BLOOD

NEEDING
TO CHANGE
YOUR PERIOD
PRODUCT
EVERY HOUR

NOT
STARTING
YOUR PERIOD
UNTIL YOU
ARE 16
YEARS OLD

USING A
MENSTRUAL
CUP

Age 13+

Print and cut the following statements creating one set for each group of pupils.

WRAPPING A
TAMPON IN
LOO ROLL AND
HIDING IT UP
YOUR SLEEVE
UNTIL YOU
FIND A BIN

FEELING
ITCHY
AROUND YOUR
VULVA

Print and cut the following statements creating one set for each group of pupils.

HAVING SEX
ON YOUR
PERIOD

TALKING TO
YOUR BOY/
GIRLFRIEND
ABOUT YOUR
PERIOD

FINDING YOUR
CYCLE CHANGES
IF YOU TAKE
DIFFERENT
CONTRACEPTIVES

GOING ON
THE PILL TO
STOP YOUR
PERIODS

ACTIVITY 3: ANSWERS FOR TEACHERS

AGE 11+

Starting your period after your friends do

Normal, starting any time between ages of 8 and 16 is totally normal

Being scared to use a tampon

Normal, tampons can be quite intimidating. Always read the instructions first. If you can feel it and it feels uncomfortable then you've probably got it wrong

Leaking blood on your clothes during a period

Normal, although it can be embarrassing this is nothing to be ashamed of. Blood washes off with cold water and soap

Going swimming on your period

Normal, although wear a tampon or a cup. Not a pad

Having a bath on your period

Normal, you won't notice any blood

Brown period blood

Normal, blood goes brown as it gets in contact with the air

Talking to your friends about your period

Normal, periods are nothing to be embarrassed about

Being angry a few days before your period starts

Normal, but everyone experiences periods differently

Having a period about every 25-35 days

Normal, but everyone experiences periods differently

AGE 13+

Having labia that dangle down

Normal. If pupils are worried about this, there is an excellent resource by Brook and the British Society for Paediatric and Adolescent Gynaecology (BritSPAG) called 'So what is a Vulva anyway?' which you could show pupils

Cloudy stretchy discharge about 10 days after your period

Normal. The cervix produces mucus in varying quantities and consistencies throughout the menstrual cycle (this is discharge)

Waxing your pubic hair

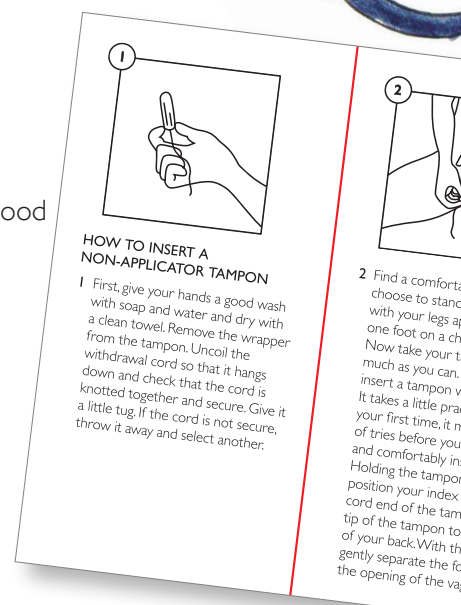
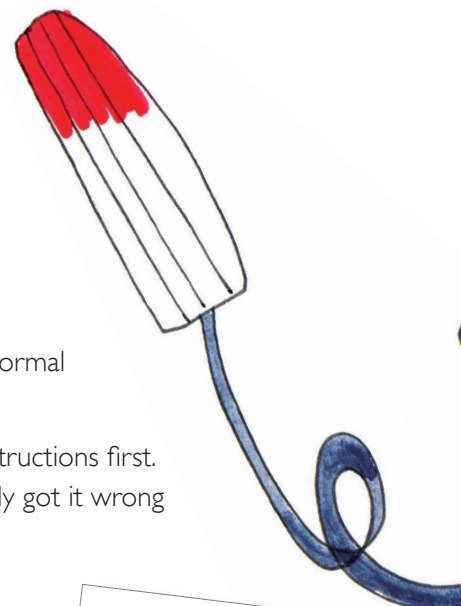
Normal, but people can do whatever they want to with their pubic hair. Girls should not feel under any pressure to wax, shave, epilate or trim

Having really irregular periods

Normal in the first couple of years. From then on not normal and a cause for visiting the doctor

Talking to your dad about periods

Should be normal, but perhaps isn't for many families - you could direct pupils to the Hey Girls #Pads4Dads resources for further discussion
<https://www.heygirls.co.uk/pads-for-dads/>



WHY DO WE FIND IT SO HARD TO TALK ABOUT PERIODS?

Half the population of the world has a period roughly every month for almost all of their lives and they are part of what makes them who they are. But they're often seen as something dirty and embarrassing. Why is that?



© Hey Girls CIC 2019

ACTIVITY 3: ANSWERS FOR TEACHERS

AGE 13+ continued

Having a heavy flow for the first couple of days
Normal

Feeling really depressed and anxious each month
Not Normal. Many people experience mood swings around their periods, but cyclical depression and anxiety is a symptom of PMDD. See a doctor

Dark red blobs in your period blood
Normal provided they are fairly small. Clots the size of a 10p piece or larger are a reason to visit the doctor

Such bad cramps that you faint or pass out
Not normal. Go to your GP

Having a sore back on the first day of your period
Normal, but everyone experiences periods differently

Finding green discharge in your pants
Not normal and could be a sign of infection. Go to your GP or a local sexual health clinic

Needing to change your period product every hour
Not normal if this is sustained over a period of several hours.
If you are bleeding heavily go to your GP

Not starting your period until you are 16 years old
Normal, starting any time between ages of 8 and 16 is totally normal. If you are 17 and you have never had a period, you might want to get a check up

Using a menstrual cup
Normal, many women use cups

Wrapping a tampon in loo roll and hiding it up your sleeve until you find a bin
Normal, never flush period products down the toilet. They clog the drains and pollute the oceans

Feeling itchy around your vulva
Normal to be a bit itchy occasionally. Not normal to be very itchy and painful. As this could be a sign of infection you should go to your GP or a local sexual health clinic



WRAP IT AND BIN IT - NEVER FLUSH IT!

ACTIVITY 3: ANSWERS FOR TEACHERS

AGE 15+

Having sex on your period

Normal, provided you and your partner are both consenting

Talking to your boy/girlfriend about your period

Normal, periods are nothing to be secret or ashamed about

Finding your cycle changes if you take different contraceptives

Normal, hormonal contraceptives all affect the menstrual cycle

Going on the pill to stop your periods

Increasingly normal, although only take contraceptives with the advice of your doctor



Missing
a period
or two...

...can be
a sign you are
pregnant

