



SANG RANCUNE 76 PRESENTS

PERIODS without trouble

THE LITTLE GUIDE ABOUT
PERIODS

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Contents

This short guide book is prepared for those who want to improve their understanding of human body, or for those who already know it but are still curious. Or for even those, who don't have periods at all but want to understand what half of the humankind lives through.

The guidebook is written by students, for students with the help of Sangrancune76 a Rouen based foundation. Reviewed by Tiphaine Cartier, a liberal midwife, this guide will help you to realize that we all live the same (unpleasant) experiences, have the same fears and that we have the desire to learn more about this subject.

Sangrancune76 was founded in Rouen, France on March 8 2019 in order to fight against menstruel precariousness and to lift the taboos around it. The foundation has pick-up locations for period products all around the town. It also collect period products in supermarkets to redistribute them to the people in need. Moreover, it started to raise awareness among different types of populations.

If you have any question, do not hesitate to talk with a medical professional. There is also a free and anonymous online chat network called "lespipelettes.org" created by midwives.

1. What is menstruation ?

Menstruation is the flow of blood coming from your uterus, which flows through your vagina each month from puberty till the menopause and it occurs in total around 42 years.

The inside of the uterus is covered by a mucosa called the endometrium, which thickens every month, under the influence of hormones, in order to welcome the fertilized egg. This mucosa allows the fertilized ovum to implant itself in the uterus.

In absence of a fertilized ovum, the mucosa will leak out of the uterus in the form of blood by detaching itself from the uterus.

This flow of blood and cellular tissue which can last 2 to 10 days is called a period.

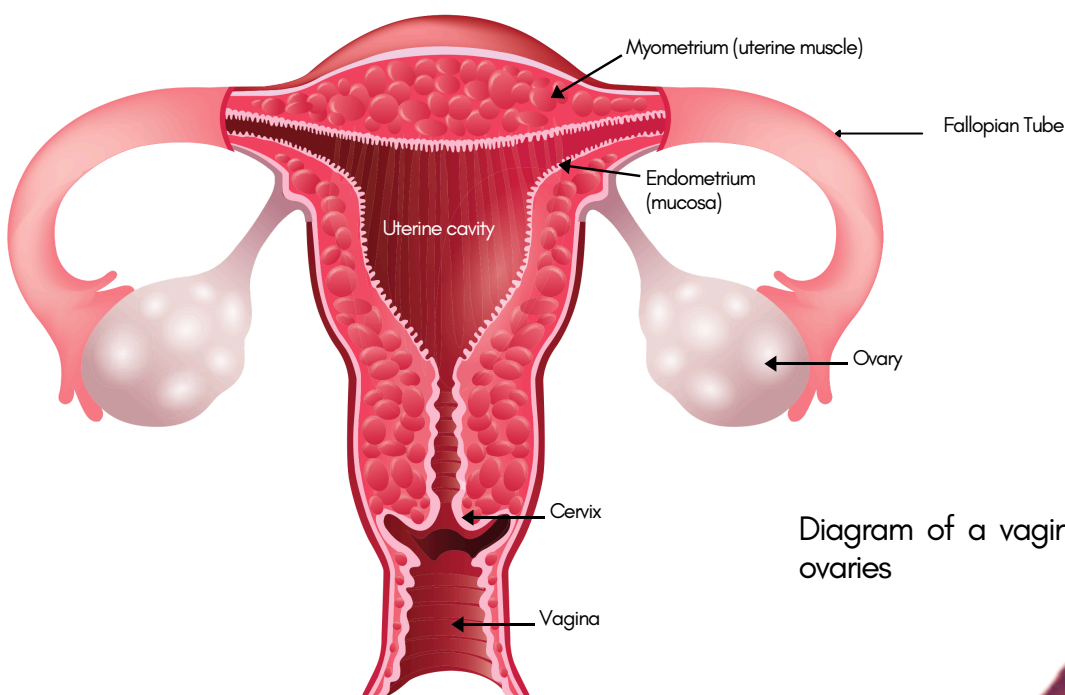


Diagram of a vagina, an uterus and ovaries

2. Pre-Menstrual Syndrome (PMS)

Very often minimized or ignored, the PMS (Pre-Menstrual Syndrome) has a real impact in the everyday life. It consists of a number of physical and psychological symptoms, which can appear between a few days, or few weeks before the period. We can only relieve its effects (cf chapter 5).

Did you know that...

The stereotype of the “hysterical woman” often comes from the PMS which affects the mood due to hormones.

Some examples of the symptoms :

NAUSEA **HEADACHE** **CRAMPS**
ACNE **DIGESTIVE PROBLEMS**
SEVERE FATIGUE **BLOATING**
CHEST SENSITIVITY
HOT FLASHES **STOMACH ACHE**

”

"It happens to me 3-4 days before my period, the symptoms vary but usually, I am very tired, my back, stomach and chest hurt. I don't eat much, I have nausea and I am hypersensitive."

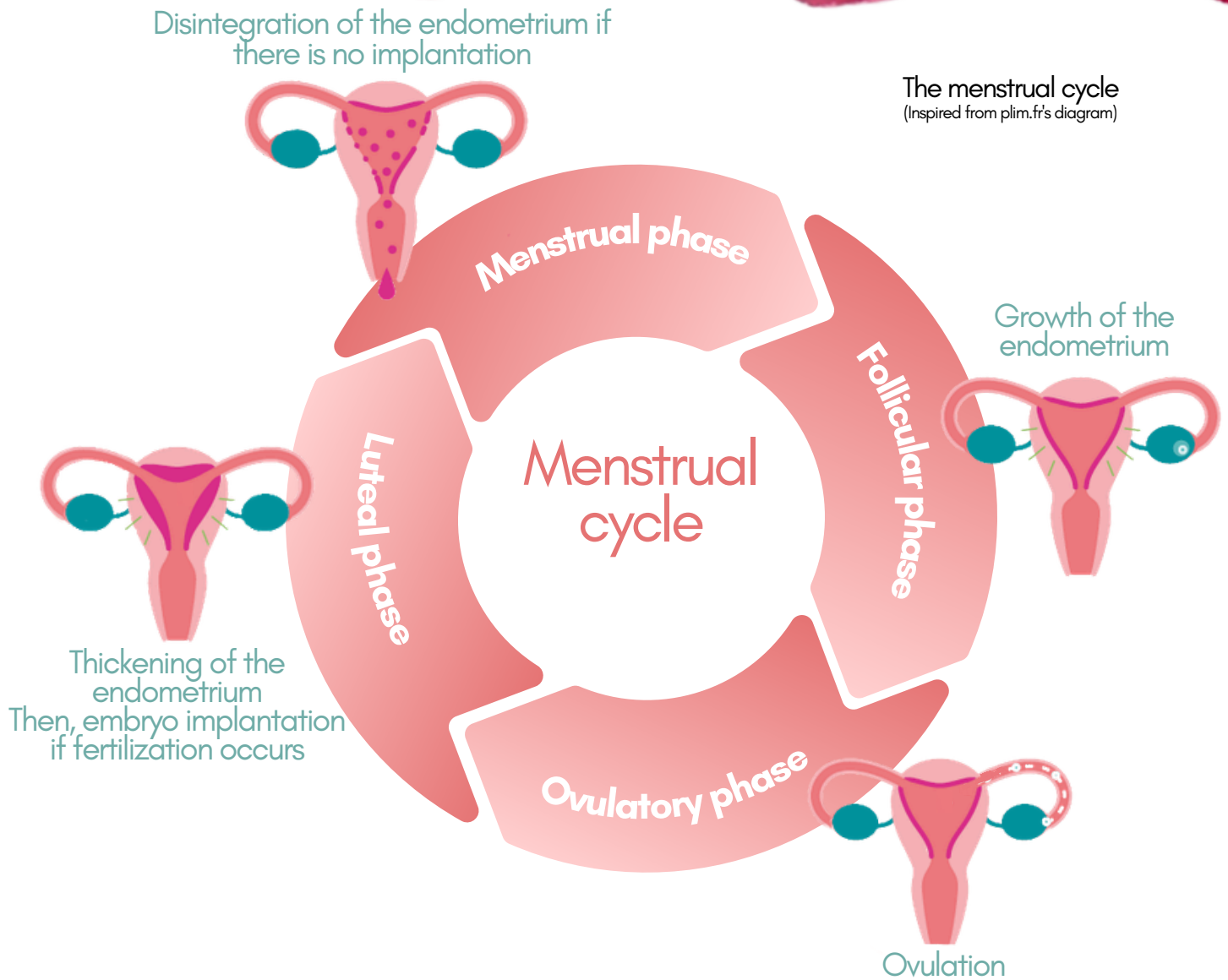
C. (20 y.o)

3. The Menstrual Cycle

The menstrual cycle is a set of phenomena that repeat periodically, under the influence of hormones, in order to prepare your body for a potential pregnancy.

The cycle starts on the first day of menstruation. When it ends, the endometrium, the mucous membrane lining inside the uterus, begins to reform. During this time, an oocyte (a small egg) matures inside your ovaries. It is then expelled by the ovary into the Fallopian tube around the 14th day of the cycle (this date differs from person to person): it is the ovulation. The endometrium then continues to thicken and change to accommodate a possible embryo if fertilization occurs. At the end of the cycle, the absence of pregnancy leads to a tear in the endometrium and a flow of blood which is called a period. A new cycle can then begin.

Your cycle does not have to last 28 days, it can last between 21 and 35 days. It depends on the length of the follicular and luteal phases, which are specific to your body. Moreover, since we are not machines, it happens that the length of the cycle can vary from one period of your life to another for reasons such as stress.



A person does not bleed non-stop for a whole week, it fluctuates. The uterine mucous membrane is gradually detached each time. Therefore, it is not necessarily a liquid net, since there are also cells of the uterine mucosa, there may be fragments. The color of your period can also vary from bright red to brownish.



To conclude, the menstrual cycle is like your body's way of preparing a nest for a possible pregnancy in the uterus. If there is no pregnancy, the debris from the nest flows along the vagina and then a new nest is prepared. All these phenomena of the cycle are invisible, and the period is its only visible marker. It is also a nonviolent form of bleeding.

Did you know that...

It is not necessary to have a period in order to be healthy: some hormonal contraceptive methods (intrauterine devices: IUD, implants, pills) can cause amenorrhea, i.e., suppress menstruation. Some people find it much more comfortable not to bleed.

For some, who suffer from severe pain during menstruation or endometriosis, this amenorrhea can be desirable. Yet some people continue to acknowledge that these methods of contraception are dangerous because "it is necessary to have periods". Period does not "clean" your uterus, and not having it is not toxic for your health. Since those hormonal contraceptive methods suppress the preparation of the nest, there won't be anything for your uterus to evacuate.

If you don't use such a contraceptive method, but also don't menstruate, you should consult a health professional.

What about white discharges ?

White discharge is a secretion produced by the lining of the vaginal wall as soon as the hormones start to stimulate them. It therefore begins during puberty but can precede the first menstruation by a few months. It is a normal phenomenon! This white discharge helps to clean the vagina and to lubricate the vulva during sexual intercourse. It can be white or translucent and have no odor. The quantity and the viscosity may vary during the cycle.

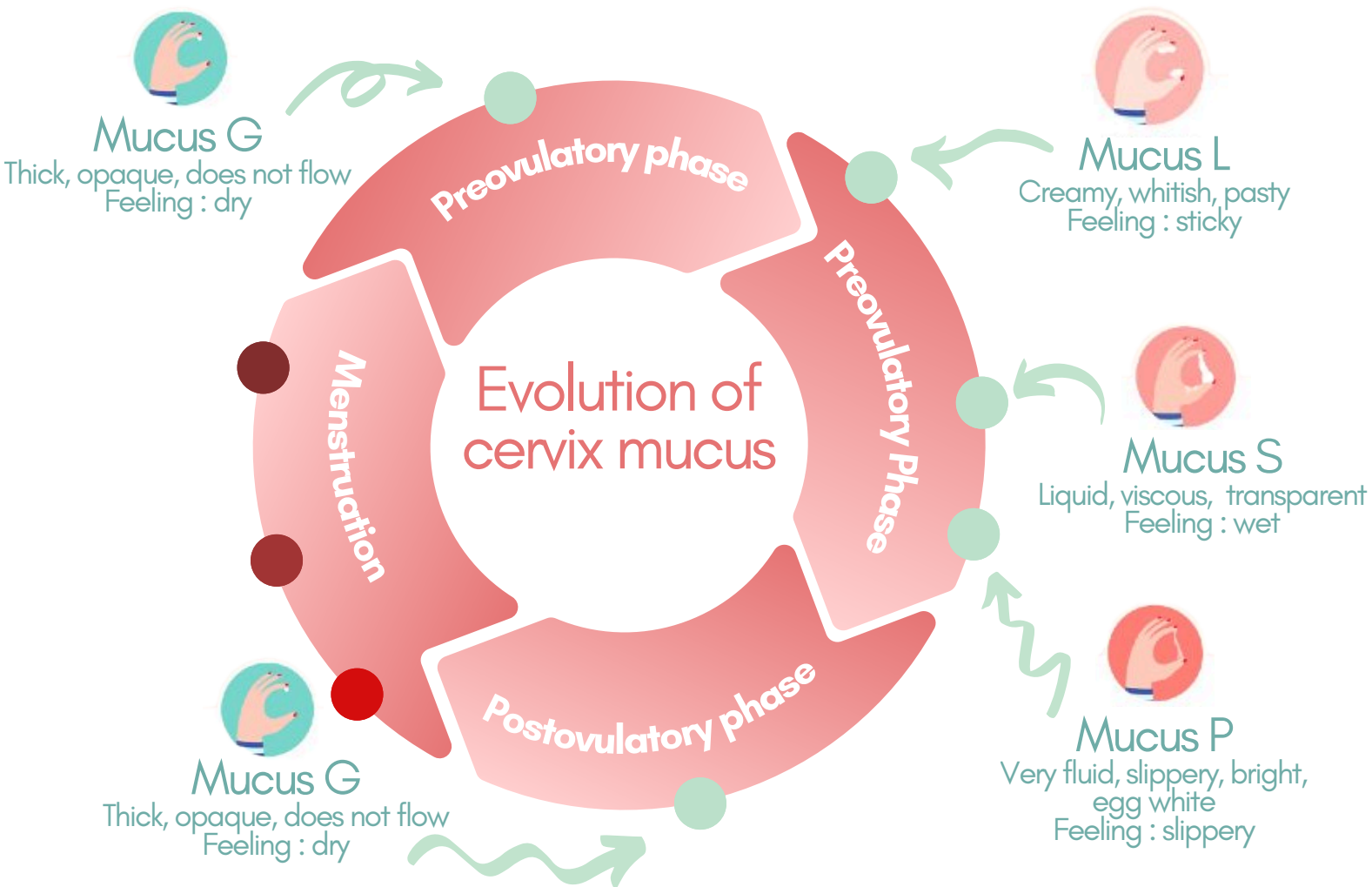
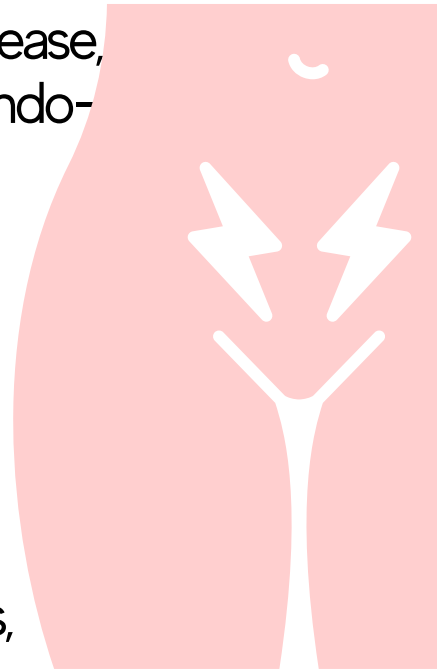


Diagram of cervix mucus aspect according to the menstrual cycle
(Inspired from "Émancipées" website's diagram)

4. Diseases and periods

Dysmenorrhea is the pain in the lower abdomen that precedes or starts with menstruation. There are many causes that can explain the dysmenorrhea : endometriosis or adenomyosis, a presence of a uterine fibroma (non-cancerous tumors on the wall of the uterus), a malformation of the uterus...

Endometriosis is a chronic gynecological disease, which affects one in ten people. Basically, the endometrium, the mucous membrane that lines the uterine cavity, implants itself elsewhere, in the organs near the uterus. During menstruation, these abnormally implanted pieces of endometrium are subjects to the same hormonal changes as the rest of the endometrium, which mainly causes significant and sometimes disabling pain, heavy periods and in some cases, infertility...



Adenomyosis is a type of endometriosis, in which endometrial cells infiltrate the myometrium, the muscle of the uterus.



Menorrhagia is an abnormally heavy and long period. The causes also vary: endometriosis or adenomyosis, uterine fibroma, polyps (small benign cysts), complication of an hormonal or copper IUD, or certain cancers...

Amenorrhea is the opposite; it is the absence of periods. It can be due to a method of contraception, an emotional shock, an excess of sport, a situation of anorexia, damage to the pituitary gland... but also pregnancy or breastfeeding

Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) is caused by toxins produced by a common bacteria, *Staphylococcus aureus*, in the bloodstream. Menstrual TSS can occur if the tampon or the cup is used improperly, allowing the bacteria to multiply. If flu-like symptoms occur, such as a feeling of discomfort or a rash, remove the tampon immediately and seek medical attention. To limit the occurrence of TSS, wash your hands with soap and water before inserting or removing a tampon or the cup, change them regularly (every 4 hours) and use sanitary napkins at night.

5. Tips for pain relief

Some people have more or less painful periods than others. Each person has their own unique way of experiencing them.

Premenstrual symptoms can continue during the period. There are several methods to relieve them.

In case of persistent pain, it is necessary to consult a health professional. Under the advice of a doctor, a midwife or a pharmacist, painkillers, anti-inflammatories, and antispasmodics can be taken.



Natural solutions can also relieve pain :

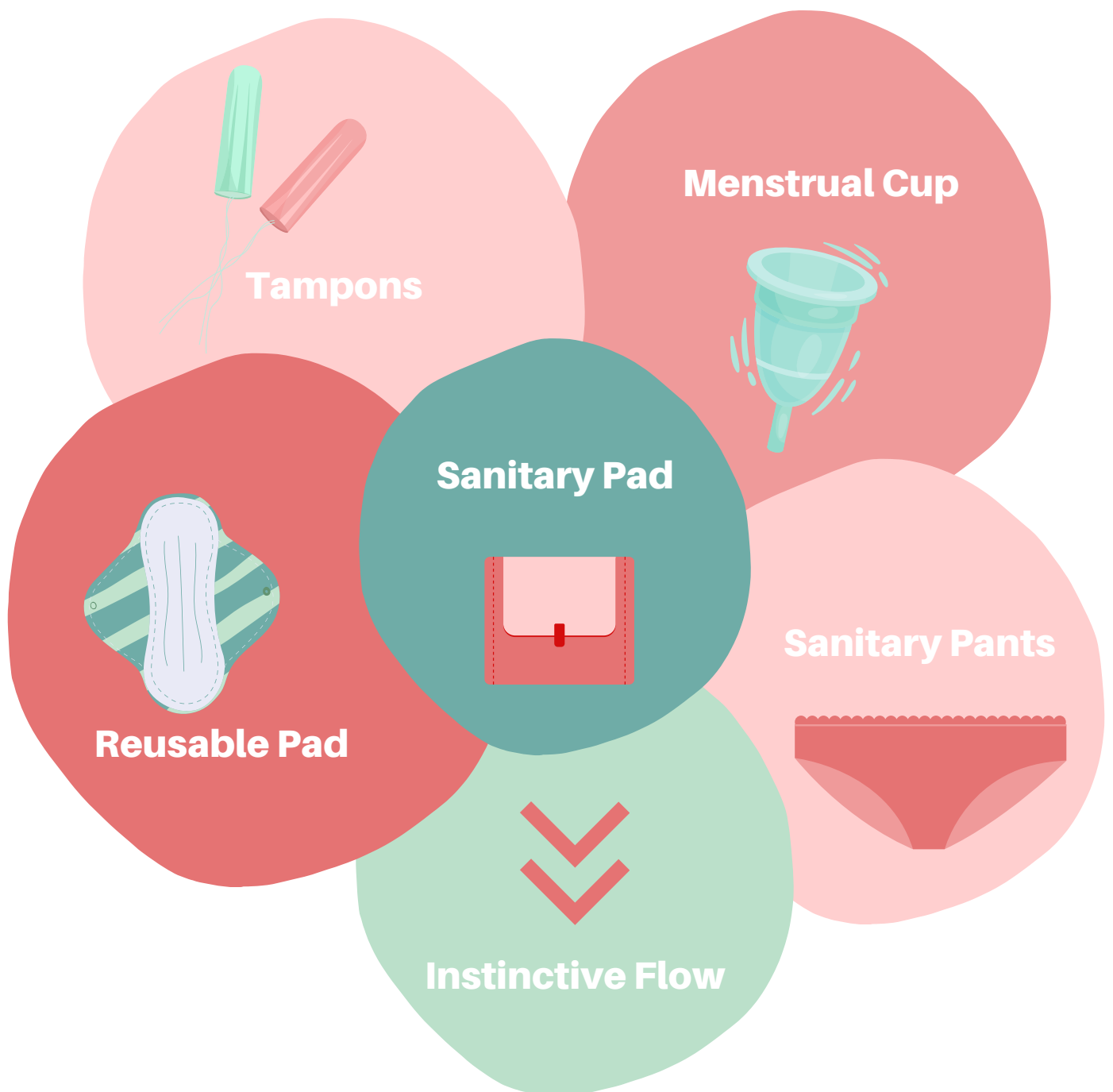
- Heat : allows to relax the muscles and thus reduce pain. A hot water bottle or a hot bath can help you.
- Practicing sports : allows a release of oxygen in the body, which will allow you to relax, and will relax the muscles and improve blood circulation.
- The use of plants : like valerian, yarrow and black cohosh is another alternative. They are available on the internet, at the herbalist, in pharmacies...
- The use of essential oils : lavender, clary sage, marjoram and cypress sage, (add them to a hot bath).



- The use of therapies : acupuncture (to be applied before the beginning of the menstruation), homeopathy or osteopathy.

6. Periods products : which one is yours ?

There are lots of different products and each person will use the one that adapts well with their body, their needs and their daily life





Menstrual Cup

PRICE PER UNIT :

15 TO 40 €

LOCATION :

INSIDE YOUR VAGINA

DURATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT :

5-10 YEARS (ABOUT 8 CUPS IN A LIFETIME)

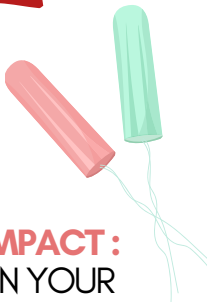
Advantages

COST EFFECTIVE IN THE LONG TERM
ECO-FRIENDLY
HIDDEN
EASY TO TRANSPORT
VARIOUS SIZES

Drawbacks

NEEDS TO BE STERILIZED AFTER EACH USE
TOXIC SHOCK RISK
NEEDS TO BE CLEANED OUT EVERY 4 HOURS
BLOOD CAN GO ON YOUR FINGERS
CAN BE HARD TO PUT

Tampons



PRICE PER UNIT :

3,10 € (X18), NON ORGANIC
5,30 € (X16), ORGANIC

LOCATION :

INSIDE YOUR VAGINA

DURATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT :

MORE THAN 10 000 TAMPONS USED IN YOUR LIFETIME, HARMFUL TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Advantages

VARIOUS SIZES
SMALL
DISCRET
EASY TO TRANSPORT
EASY TO USE

Drawbacks

RISK OF VAGINAL DRYNESS
TOXIC SHOCK RISK
BLOOD CAN GO ON YOUR FINGERS
EXACT COMPOSITION UNKNOWN
NOT VERY ECO FRIENDLY
CAN BE HARD TO PUT

Sanitary pads



PRICE PER UNIT :
1,90 € (X15), NON ORGANIC
5,40 € (X10), ORGANIC

LOCATION
IN YOUR
PANTIES

DURATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT :
MORE THAN 10 000 USED IN YOUR LIFETIME,
HARMFUL TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Advantages

EASY TO TRANSPORT
VARIOUS SIZES
EASY TO USE
EASY TO DISPOSE

Drawbacks

EXACT COMPOSITION
UNKNOWN
UNCOMFORTABLE, "IT STICKS"
"IT'S ITCHY"
NOT VERY ECO FRIENDLY



Reusable pads

PRICE PER UNIT
15-20 €

LOCATION
IN YOUR PANTIES

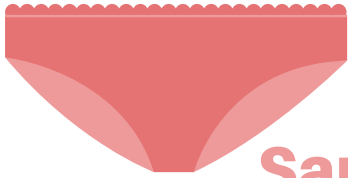
DURATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT :
APPROXIMATELY 5 YEARS, COMPONENTS ARE
USUALLY ECO FRIENDLY

Advantages

REUSABLE
ECO FRIENDLY
NO CHEMICALS
COMFY

Drawbacks

WASHING (BY HAND OR WITH A
WASHING MACHINE)
SEVERAL ARE REQUIRED
NEED TO BE CAREFULLY
TRANSPORTED WHEN USED



Sanitary pants

PRICE PER UNIT :
30 À 35€

LOCATION :
IN YOUR PANTIES

DURATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT :
APPROXIMATELY 5 YEARS, COMPONENTS ARE
USUALLY ECO FRIENDLY

Advantages

**DISCRETE
AESTHETIC
COMFY**

Drawbacks

**MAINTENANCE (BY HAND OR
WITH A WASHING MACHINE)
SEVERAL ARE REQUIRED
HIGH PRICE**

Instinctive Flow



PRICE PER UNIT :
FREE

LOCATION :
-

DURATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT :
VERY ECO FRIENDLY

Advantages

**NATURAL METHOD
FREE**

Drawbacks

**LONG TIME TO MASTER
RISKS OF LACK OF CONTROL**



The free instinctive flow means not using any protections, and holding your flow by controlling your perineal muscles, and then going to the toilet to let the blood flow out.

Menstrual precariousness is an obstacle for menstruating people and makes it harder for them to have access to sanitary products. This precariousness is due to the high cost of menstruation: about 8,000€ of menstrual budget over a lifetime, to which the cost of doctor's appointments, painkillers, underwear etc... must be added. This precariousness, which is still a taboo, has important consequences: social exclusion, dropping out of school, absenteeism from work, making makeshift protection from toilet paper, newspaper, fabric, that can cause irritations or infections...

1 in every 10 students makes their own protection for financial reasons (FAGE, ANESF, AFEP survey, February 8, 2020). The government has announced the introduction of sanitary product dispensers in places of education from the start of the academic year 2021, but we are waiting for this measure to be implemented on a permanent basis.

Did you know that...

Until 2005, tampons were considered "luxury goods". They were taxed 20%, today, the tax is 5,5%.

7. The Virginity Myth

Have you ever questioned yourself about the impact of tampons on your hymen? Hymen is a very thin membrane at the opening of your vagina. It has no known purpose and can be torn by practicing sports, masturbation, having a sexual intercourse (not necessarily the first one), or by inserting a tampon in your vagina. Hymen can have many shapes, and every body is unique : it can be absent or on the contrary totally covering the hole, very vascular (which can bleed a lot if it breaks) or not.

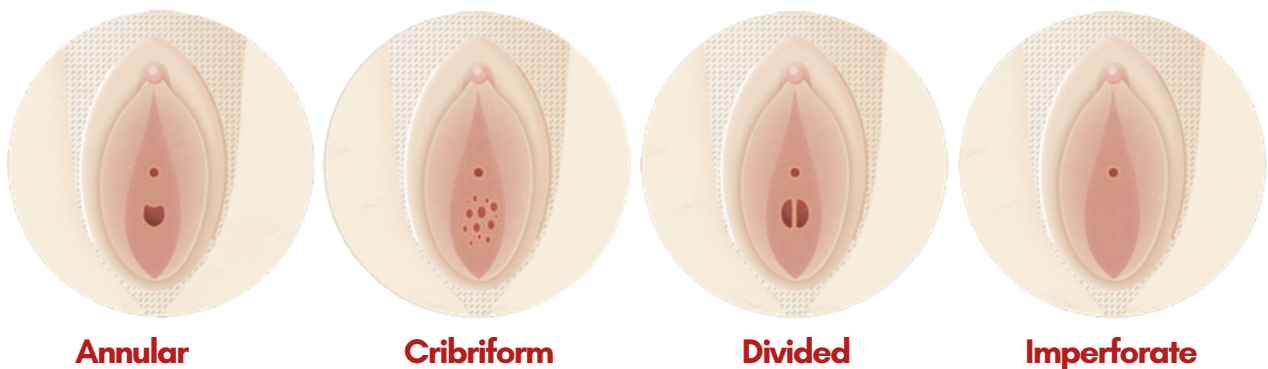


Diagram representing different kinds of hymen – non-exhaustive list
(<https://www.gynandco.be/>)

Virginity is a social construct made to control women's bodies; it doesn't define your worth! You are free to do whatever you want with your body, and no one has the right to force you to be a virgin or to ask you to prove it.

8. Sea, sex and periods

Many of us don't even think about having a sexual intercourse during our period because of the pain or the lack of desire. But orgasms and periods can be a great combo too! However, sexuality is still a taboo and so are periods. Alone or with someone, let's see our tips.

Having an orgasm is good for your health, say it louder ! But why? Orgasm relieves pain because your brain will secrete endorphins (neurotransmitters with painkiller effects, also secreted after running) which help to reduce stress.

Furthermore, some people notice a higher sexual desire and pleasure during this time. Blood also helps to lubricate the vagina, but it doesn't replace a lubricant. Contraction of the vagina during orgasm will also increase blood flow which can reduce the length of menstruation.



You can pay more attention than usual if you want by: having a shower before sex or having sex under a hot shower or by putting a towel on your in bed,...

Whether it is during your period or not, there is no requirement for a vaginal penetration : masturbation alone or with a partner, or oral sex, are still valid options.

Remember about condoms or contraceptive methods because there is a risk of getting pregnant, even if it is low (spermatozoons can live up to 5 days in your uterus so they can still be there during ovulation), and you can get a sexually transmitted infection. Anyways, being tested before the intercourse is the best way to avoid problems!

Pleasure, during your period or not, is never bad so enjoy and discover your body!

And if you are two, communication and respect are essentials.



9. Gender and menstruation

Not only women have periods, but also men can have them too! In fact, transgender men or non-binary people assigned to women at birth may still have their uterus and ovaries so they still can have periods.



Periods may be a very negative experience for trans people because it may confront them to situations that might exacerbate their feelings between their gender identity and a social phenomenon associating them with female norms in which they didn't see themselves.

Having a period reminds them about the existence of their genitals associated with female gender, as well as physical and psychological symptoms connected to them (Premenstrual Syndrome, Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder) that can lead to dysphoria.



One of main sources of stress is the access to toilets which are often gendered, and the linked surveillance that, these toilets are being intended for people whose gender expression is in agreement with their birth assignment.

Menstruating transgender men, while using men's toilets are often confronted with the lack of a trash can, and they can not throw away their used pads and tampons. Moreover, the sound of the protections' plastic packaging could be heard, revealing their transidentity.

There is also the fact that they can feel uncomfortable buying their pads in the supermarket. In the same way, when you're a man, explaining that you're feeling bad or asking a coworker for a tampon when you don't have one, can be very difficult to live with.

Definitions :

Transgender Person : Person who doesn't or not totally recognize themselves by the gender assigned at birth.

Non binary Person : Person who doesn't identify with the binary male-female system

Gender Dysphoria : A medical term, the feeling of a strong relation to a gender that isn't the one given at birth.

10. Periods around the world

”

“I came from a Chinese family, and periods are very taboo. Women are considered weak and get a special treatment. We have to drink tea or hot chocolate. In order to say that we have our periods, we use sentences such as “it's THE time, I prefer to drink hot water, I'm a bit tired”. I showed my menstrual panties to my mom, she was disgusted, she doesn't want me to wash them in our sinks”

C. (21 y.o)

”

“In France biology lessons teaches us what periods are, it helps to fight taboos within the family, but we learn only the scientific side (and even not everything like PSM), we don't learn how to manage pain, use periods pads etc. I think that we are more ashamed to talk about that in front of men, because with women we talk more freely”

E. (22y.o)

”

“In Madagascar taboos are also present like everywhere else, but it's also one of the poorest countries in the world. Period poverty is a real problem : people don't always have access to water in many regions.”

M. (20 y.o)



”

“In Morocco it’s still complicated. Tampons are very taboo, many women told me ‘ don’t put that on or you’ll lose your virginity’, still I can’t imagine buying tampons.”

S. (20 y.o)

”

“Animism, a religion very popular in Benin, says that women aren’t allowed to touch holy objects or participate in cults. Tampons are still pretty unknown, and pads or pads made of fabric”

O. (20 y.o)

”

" In Russia there are few taboos until 30-40 yo. Then periods are considered as normal so they have to be kept in privacy, some people are ashamed to buy period pads or to show their pads in front of colleagues... Furthermore a lot of orthodox believers (main religion there) say that people having their periods can't go to church or touch all religion objects related. And it's the same restriction for the 40 days after delivery. "

S. (23 y.o)



BINGOOO !

I have already :

HAD TO FORCE MYSELF TO
TAKE A SPORTS CLASS

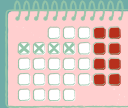
FELT MY TAMPON
GRADUALLY GOING
DOWN

BEEN AFRAID THAT MY
TAMPON STRING WOULD
STICK OUT OF MY
SWIMSUIT



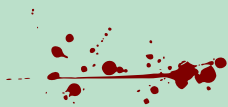
I WAS AFRAID OF MY
PERIOD BEING LATE, EVEN
THOUGH I KNEW I WASN'T
PREGNANT

BEEN SURPRISED BY THE
ARRIVAL OF MY PERIODS



SLEPT BADLY AT NIGHT

STAINED MY CLOTHES



HAD REPROACHES
BECAUSE PEOPLE THOUGHT
I WAS EXAGGERATING MY
PAIN

HAD BLOOD ON MY HANDS
WHEN I CAME OUT OF A
PUBLIC TOILET AND HID
THEM UNTIL I WASHED THEM

HAD TROUBLE PUTTING IN
MY FIRST TAMPONS

REFUSED AN INVITATION TO
STAY AT SOMEONE'S
HOME DURING THIS PERIOD



BEEN ASHAMED OF
THROWING AWAY MY
PROTECTION IN A PUBLIC
OR PRIVATE PLACE

MADE IMPROVISED PADS
OUT OF TOILET PAPER

SAID "I AM SICK" INSTEAD
OF "I HAVE MY PERIOD"



DOWNPLAYED MY PAIN IN
FRONT OF PEOPLE

BOUGHT REUSABLE PADS



ASKED A STRANGER FOR
PROTECTION BECAUSE I
DIDN'T HAVE ANY ON ME

ASKED A FRIEND IF I HAD A
BLOODSTAIN

HAD A FEW DROPS OF
BLOOD JUST AFTER MY
PERIOD ENDED

HAD THE FEELING THAT I
WAS BLEEDING WHEN I WAS
NOT

HAD BLOOD ON MY HANDS
WHEN REMOVING MY
TAMPON OR MENSTRUAL
CUP

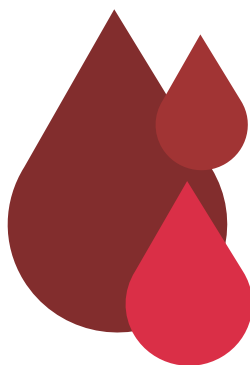


TAKEN MEDICATION FOR
PAIN



bled when I was getting
out of the shower (#RIP
THE TOWEL)

ORGANISED MY HOLIDAYS
ACCORDING TO MY
CYCLE



... Focused on periods



SANG RANCUNE 76

Agit localement pour lutter contre la précarité menstruelle



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