All girls and women have periods. This booklet tells you what to do when you start having them too.
What & Why

A period is bleeding through a girl's or woman's vagina (vay-jee-nuh) that lasts for a few days.

Q: When will my periods start?
- 8 years old?
- 12 years old?
- 16 years old?

☆ Usually when you are 12 or 13 but you could be as young as 8 or as old as 17. Your periods will start when your body is ready. You can't make them start or stop them from starting.

My two best friends have started their periods. I'm twelve and worried that it hasn't happened to me yet.

Girls are born with thousands of eggs inside their ovaries (over-ees). When you reach puberty one is released every month from your ovaries. The egg moves along the fallopian (fa-low-pe-an) tube to your womb (woom). The womb is where a baby would grow if the egg was fertilised (fur-ti-lized) by sperm from a man.

The changes to do with growing up are called puberty (pew-ber-tee). During puberty your breasts will start to grow, and hair begins to grow under your arms and between your legs. Changes also happen inside your body. Although you are much too young to think of having a baby, your body starts getting ready for it.

Your womb gets ready for a possible pregnancy each month and its lining becomes thick and soft. When your body knows that no baby is growing, the lining and the egg pass out of your body through the vagina. This is your period. You won't be able to see the egg, it's much too tiny.
The time between one period and the next is called the **menstrual cycle** (men-stroo-al sy-kal). People often talk about having a monthly or 28 day cycle, but many girls have a cycle that is longer or shorter than that. So don’t expect to be the same as your friends.

I was about eleven. Sometimes I noticed a yellowy white stain in my pants. I was too embarrassed to tell my mum. A year later I started my periods.

Some girls get a whitish stain in their pants. This is a sign that their periods may soon begin.

**Q** How much blood will I lose during my period?

**A** It may look like a lot but it is only about 4 - 6 tablespoons. It’s unlikely to be a sudden gush of blood that will take you by surprise. You will probably see a red-brown stain on your pants or on your sheets when you wake up in the morning.

Periods come about once every month, but your body needs practice to get this right. So for the first year or more the time between your periods may be different. This can make it difficult to know when you will have your period. After a while your periods should become more regular. You can then use a diary to work out when your period is due.

**Q** Will I know when my period is about to start?

**A** Your breasts may become sore or a bit larger. You may get spots on your face or feel a bit moody the week before your period starts. You’ll often feel better when it does start. You may get stomach cramps just before.

Your period can often start when you don’t expect it, especially in the first year or so.

**Q** How long will my period last?

**A** Some girls may bleed for two days, others for eight days. Most bleed for about four or five days. Your periods may be different each time, especially when you first start.

**Q** When can a girl become pregnant?

**A** When she reaches puberty, and starts to have periods.

**Q** Can a girl get pregnant during her periods?

**A** Yes, if she has sex. The time when your body releases an egg can vary and a boy’s sperm can live in your body for several days.
You can use either sanitary towels or tampons to catch the blood. Towels soak up the blood as it leaves your body and tampons fit inside your vagina and absorb the blood before it leaves your body. One method isn't better than the other. It's for you to decide which you find easiest and most comfortable to use.

My older sister was the best. I went home and told her what had happened, and she went into it all with me. She made me laugh, she told me all these stories about what happened to her. Since then, I've been able to say anything to her.

Towels have a sticky strip that sticks to the inside of your pants. You need to pull off the strip on the back and stick your towel onto your pants longways.

Many toilets have special bins for this...

Hey! Is there a bin in yours?

...and if they don’t, ask a female teacher why not!

We're very easy to use because you can see when you need to change us...

Finding the towel you prefer will help you feel comfortable.
Some of us have a cardboard tube on the outside to help you put us in.

Before you put a tampon in, you need to find your vagina.

It may take some practice before you can use tampons as it can take a while to get the hang of them.

"Mini or slender tampons are easiest for girls first starting to use tampons.

Q: Does putting in a tampon for the first time hurt?

A: No, not if you relax. It's difficult to put a tampon in if you're tense and not sure how to put it in. Read the instructions that come with tampons to find out how to put them in. If the tampon feels uncomfortable it may not be in far enough.

Q: Can I practice using tampons before my periods start?

A: It's not really a good idea to use tampons when you don't have a period as they can cause dryness and irritation. It's much easier to put a tampon in when you are having a period.

Q: What if the string breaks and I can't get the tampon out?

A: The string won't break. It is joined firmly to the tampon.

A tampon cannot get lost inside you. It stays in the vagina until you take it out.

Q: Can I go to the toilet when I've got a tampon in?

A: Yes. You go to the toilet from your urethra and anus. The vagina is separate from these, so it doesn't matter if you are using a tampon.

Q: Will I smell?

A: If you wash every day and change your towel or tampon every few hours, no. You DON'T need to use perfumed pads or special sprays. In fact, these can be bad for you as they may cause irritation and they are expensive.

Q: Should I use tampons or towels? Everyone says different things.

A: Using tampons is against some religions and cultures—like mine.

Q: Will I still be a virgin if I use tampons?

A: Yes. You are a virgin until you have sex.

Q: My sister prefers to use towels. Mine says that once she got used to tampons she didn't want to change back.

A: You can see that people are different and that it's up to you!

You must change the towel or tampon several times a day. It may not be easy to see if a tampon needs changing, but you must do this about every four hours, or sooner. Remember to wash your hands before and after you do this. Always check that you’ve taken out your last tampon at the end of your period.

Sometimes girls can have problems with tampons. If you have two or more of the following: being sick; a rash; sore throat; sudden fever; diarrhoea, stop using tampons and see your doctor right away.