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# a dad's guide to periods

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#Pads4Dads



hey girls...



**let's not leave  
dads out of  
the bloody  
conversation.**

Michael Sheen, Actor, Activist, Dad.

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# why pads 4 dads



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Here at Hey Girls, we know that talking to young people about puberty can be awkward. Chatting about periods can be even harder, especially if you don't experience them yourself. Obviously, every Dad is different - but many that we spoke to said they don't know enough about periods to feel confident having 'the chat' with their kids. Chances are no one told them about periods when they were younger, or maybe they just feel a bit awkward and leave things to Mum.

We think it's a bit nuts that around half the population has a period almost every month, but that they can still be seen as secret and shameful. We're pushing for better education about periods in schools for all pupils so we can end the stigma around periods.

In the meantime, Dads have told us that they need a helping hand. So, we have created Pads 4 Dads – a quick overview by Dads for Dads – to help you have positive conversations with all your kids about periods.

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**4 in 10** dads never learnt about periods at school.

**only 41%** of dads say they feel comfortable talking about periods with their kids, and nearly half haven't chatted to their daughters about them.

**one in 3** dads have never purchased period products.

**45% of dads** are unsure what the signs are that a girl might be about to start her period.

Based on a survey of 1500 British men including 753 Dads by Edelman Intelligence for Hey Girls, 2019



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# period 101

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Roughly every month, the female body prepares to have a baby. An egg is released and the womb develops a thick lining with everything a foetus would need to grow. Chances are the egg is not fertilised, so the lining is lost and flows out of the body as a period.

## key facts:

- | Periods are different for everyone – they can be heavy or light, short or long, very painful or fairly easy. Every person is different.
- | Most people have periods between the ages of about 12 and 50.
- | They last about 3-7 days and happen roughly once a month.
- | Most people only lose one or two shot-glasses full of blood, but the total 'flow' can be more like 100ml.
- | It can take a couple of years for periods to settle into a pattern, so many young teenagers have very irregular periods.

# when to have

# “the

# chat”

Don't wait for the perfect moment – there isn't one. And don't save everything up for one big chat.

It's much easier to talk about difficult topics early and often. If periods come up in conversation naturally – maybe you're in the shop picking up tampons for your partner, or watching a movie which makes a reference to PMS – take the chance to chat. You don't need to cover everything in one go and it will help to repeat the conversation a few times over the years.

If you live with a female partner or relative maybe have a think about ways of approaching the conversation together. Sometimes a joint approach works best.

As a rough guide, schools cover periods and puberty when kids are in their last year of primary school (so aged 10/11). For many girls, this will be TOO LATE. 15% of people don't know what's happening when they start their period – which is scary. **If your daughter is 8, it would be worth starting the conversation.**

# how to talk to your daughters about periods

Many Dads we spoke to prefer to leave this chat to a female partner or relative....We can totally see why, but lots of girls want their Dad to be involved.

By talking with your daughter, you can send the message that periods are nothing to worry about.

If you could teach your daughter three things:

1. Periods are perfectly normal – almost all women will have them during their life
2. Speak up – periods don't need to be hidden. They're nothing to be ashamed of
3. Get help – if they hurt a lot, or have a big impact on your life go and see a doctor. Always!



## anthony

We need to help people feel comfortable talking about periods when they are young, or they may live in embarrassment growing up. Breaking taboos begins at home and we men have a role to play if we want people to be treated right in society. Knowing periods exist and learning about them in depth to provide support are definitely two different things – **Anthony, Godfather of Shaelyn (5)**

# how to talk to your sons about periods

First up, it's important to say that you should speak to your sons about periods. Half the population will have periods at some point, and it's useful if the other half knows at least the basics. The science they'll probably cover in biology at school – what's missing is the human side of things.

If you could teach your son three things:

1. Periods are not gross
2. Be kind – no teasing please
3. Don't be afraid to ask questions

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## luke

I always dreamed of being the sort of father that my daughter Layla could come to with any problem. But if truth be told, there are huge gaps in my knowledge about topics important to her – from periods to how to navigate female friendship groups. #Pads4Dads means there is one less thing for me to learn in order to be the father that I hope to be. – Luke, Dad of Layla (9)





# how to talk to your non-binary kids about periods

Periods can be very difficult for transgender and non-binary people of all ages. For a kid that's not sure they identify as female, reaching puberty is hard. The first period can be very distressing – it's like a big red sign saying "WOMAN" which is no good if you aren't and don't want to be a woman.

If you could teach your kid three things:

1. They are not alone – there are loads of folk who have gone through the exact same thing
2. Get help – check out hints, tips and ways of managing online
3. Be Yourself – periods don't define you

Remember: Not all women have periods, and not all people who have periods are women...

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**pads 4 dads helped us have the conversation and it made me feel 'comfortable' with the subject even though there was a lot of 'OMG Dad!'**

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# signs they might be about to start their period

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In the UK, the average age of starting your period is 12, but people start as early as 8 or as late as 16. People who start earlier or later than their friends often worry that they're not 'normal' – reassure them, it's perfectly natural and everyone is different.



## Signs you might notice:

- Growing taller
- Breasts begin to grow
- Changing body shape
- Underarm hair
- Acne
- Mood swings

## Signs you won't notice unless they tells you:

- Discharge
- Pubic hair

## checklist:

**Stock up** – Buy some pads just in case and put them somewhere easy to access. Show your children where they are so they can help themselves if they need some. Extra supplies of dark coloured pants will also come in handy

**Period friendly bathroom** – Make sure there's a small bin in your loo (your friends will thank you for this too!)

**Make a starter kit** – help create a discrete pack for a school bag in case they start their period away from home. One or two pads is plenty

**TIP:** If a period starts and you don't have anything with you – don't panic – first periods are normally very light (although they don't always feel like that!). Some toilet roll or tissue will be fine for an hour or two while you nip to the shops.

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# being prepared

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The best tip is to make sure all your kids know what periods are long before they happen. Have the conversation early, and make a plan together for when they start so you both know what to do.



# being supportive when it happens

However well prepared you are, finding blood in your pants is scary stuff... When they start, they might tell you, or they might be so embarrassed that she keeps it a secret.



**Be supportive** – There's loads of clichés about chocolate, hot water bottles, and snuggling up on the sofa. These can help, but you are their Dad – you will know best what will make them feel better. **Give space if they need it**

**Avoid saying cringe things like 'welcome to womanhood'** – no one wants to be a grown up when they're 12, especially if it means blood and pain every month.

**Most importantly... Be their Dad** – nothing drastic has changed!

## kieran

Dads in general avoid this kind of topic because they defer to mum. **We need to change that.**

- Kieran, Dad of Dharma (19)

# don't be surprised if



Starting to bleed once a month is a bit of a change for most people. They might sometimes act a little different, and it helps if you've got their back on this one.

“when my daughter started her periods I didn't know where to start.”

- Ryan, Dad of Tazmin (16)

Everyone is different, but they might:

**Suddenly do some laundry** – leaks happen, which is perfectly normal but can be embarrassing. Don't make a big deal of it – make sure your kids know where you keep spare sheets so they can sort themselves out.

**Avoid swimming** – swimming is scary when you're bleeding, and tampons are hard to insert to begin with. Don't push it.

**Feel a bit sore** – most people get tummy cramps around their period. Everyone deals with cramps differently – gentle exercise, a hot bath, a hot water bottle or over-the-counter painkillers can help.

**PLUS:** If they started their period, they're likely also going through puberty so there may be all sorts of other things changing in their life (friends, relationships, new clothing, social media, school). Be kind – puberty is awkward for everyone...



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# buying period products

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Period products come in all kinds of types, shapes, sizes and absorbencies, which can be overwhelming for a Dad. It's worth knowing that people often use different products throughout their period as their 'flow' will vary – often heavier in the first few days, and then trailing off towards the end. It can take a while for people to work out what combination of products suits them best. Encourage your child to experiment with different brands until they find their favourite. It's best to start with pads and only move on to other products when they are ready.



### **Pads (aka sanitary towels or napkins)**

Most people use disposable pads when they first start their periods. They are the easiest product to use – they just stick inside your pants. Pads come in lots of shapes (wings /no wings) and sizes (day / night) and are made of different materials (some are plastic and bleach free, some are fragranced).

### **Tampons**

These go inside the vagina and are more convenient for exercise and swimming. They can be quite tricky to insert at first – some come with an applicator, others you insert with your finger. Tampons should never be worn for more than 8 hours as there is a very small risk of TSS (see glossary).

### **Reusable Products**

There are also a range of sustainable period products. These include cloth pads and period pants which you wash and reuse. Or, there are Menstrual Cups which sit inside the vagina to collect blood. These products can all be reused over many years – they have a higher up-front price but are cheaper in the long run, and much better for the environment as they reduce waste.

**Please remind them to never flush period products down the toilet – they will block your drains and clog up the waterways!**

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# fielding questions



Periods come with a million questions. There is lots of information online which she can check out, but sometimes she might want to ask you.

**1. Will it hurt?** – probably yes, but you'll be ok.

**2. Can I swim?** – yes, with a tampon or cup (not a pad!)

**3. Can I have a shower/bath?** – definitely, you won't really notice any blood.

**4. Will people know I'm on my period?** – nope, only if you tell them. You look the same as before, promise.

**5. What do I do with my products when they're done?** – wrap them in something and put them in the bin, never down the loo.

**6. How do I know when it will come?** – periods are quite irregular in the beginning and can surprise you at any time. After a year or so they should settle into a regular rhythm, and most folk get to know the signs. It might help her to track her period using a diary or app.

**7. All my friends have started, when will I?** – everyone is different, and there's nothing to worry about if you start earlier or later than your friends. It will happen in the end.

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# take them to the doctor if ● ● ●

Because periods are private and often hidden, it can be hard to tell if anything is wrong. For years, women have kept quiet about how much pain they're in, often waiting a long time before getting help. There are several medical conditions related to periods – for example, Endometriosis, which affects 1 in 10 women in the UK – so it is always worth seeing a doctor.

## Please take your child to the doctor if they:

1. **Experience severe pain during every period** – most people get cramps, but if they're curled up on the floor unable to move (or fainting) every month, there's something wrong
2. **Bleed very heavily** – if pads/tampons are full after an hour, for several hours, then something might be up
3. **Have very irregular periods** – for the first few years periods are a bit hit and miss, but after that if periods are really random then see a GP
4. **Experience depression or anxiety every period** – many people get mood swings, but some are much worse than others. If your child needs help, get help

If their doctor doesn't listen, get a second opinion.

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## jonson

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I have a young daughter who is still a fairly long way off from puberty but it's good to know that this resource is available to dads. Periods are, without a doubt, an awkward subject for most fathers to broach with their daughters, all the more so in Asian cultures. Having this kit really helps to overcome not only the anxiety but especially the ignorance of most men about the subject matter. – **Jonson, Dad of Gabrielle (8)**

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## dan

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To be honest that is the most information I have ever seen about periods. As a young boy at school I was never told about periods or given the opportunity to learn about them. Even as an adult these days there's not much information about periods aimed at men – **Dan, Stepdad of Nicole (14) and Lucy (12)**

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# glossary

**Menstruation** is a fancy word for having a period. It describes the phase of the menstrual cycle where blood and tissue leave the body.

Discharge is a bit like saliva – it keeps the vagina clean and moist, and protects it from infection. Normal discharge can be clear, white, watery or gloopy. It will vary in texture and quantity through the menstrual cycle. Girls start finding discharge in their pants about 6 months before their period starts.

**PMS (also known as PMT)** is where people feel a bit more tired, sensitive and grumpy as hormone changes affect the body and the emotions just before a period starts. Everyone experiences periods differently, but common symptoms before and during a period include: Bloating, Cramps, Mood swings, Tiredness, Backache, Headaches, Tender breasts, and Acne. Some people are affected more severely than others.

**TSS (Toxic Shock Syndrome)** is a very rare but serious illness that can happen when you leave a tampon in for too long. Remind your daughter to use the lowest absorbency tampon for her flow and change it at least every 8 hours (it's better to change every 4-6 hours).

# #Pads4Dads

This resource was created by Hey Girls CIC

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Designed by Lucas Denholm

For more information and resources see

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