

For more information

“Women’s Health & Wellbeing. A Guide to Sexual and Reproductive Health”

Resource: www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/lho/dublinse/social-inclusion-/

HSE Dublin and South East Social Inclusion Service

If you would like access to products or education session, or more information about sex health, safer sex and STI's please reach out to us.



Email us:
che.socialinclusion@hse.ie

For parents

The HSE has produced a series of booklets to help you talk with your children about relationships and sexuality as they grow up.

Download the “Making the ‘Big Talk’ many small talks” booklet.



Download resource
www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-parents/resources/booklets/making-the-big-talk-many-small-talks-13-to-18.pdf

HSE Dublin and South East Social Inclusion Service

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Period Dignity for all

And sexual health information

HSE Dublin and South East Social Inclusion Service

What is Period Dignity?

Period dignity is a term used to explain how many women and girls are affected by period poverty. This means they don't have the necessary products, facilities, or education needed for them to experience menstruation in dignity.

Restrictions on that freedom come in different forms, such as:

- If you do not have enough money to buy period products (pads, tampons, etc)
- If you are made feel shame or embarrassment.
- If a partner or family member controls the amount of money you get, the products you buy or what you do when you are on your period.

What are we doing about Period Dignity?

The HSE, and other Public Bodies have started to provide **free** period products to those who need it. We are also giving education sessions to those who are interested, so we can improve understanding and get rid of some of the negative feelings about periods! If you would like access to products or education session, please reach out to us (see reverse).

Period Poverty is more common than you might think!



(Healthy Ireland Survey, 2022)

Average age of first period

There is no exact age, but many will have their first period between 9 years old and 13 years old.

What happens during the menstrual cycle?

An average cycle is 28 days, but some will experience longer or shorter cycles. It is important to know what your 'normal' looks like. You can track a cycle as '**Day 1**' being the first day of your period, and the '**end day**' being the day before your next period.

Ovulation is a process that happens usually between days '**12-16**'. This is when the egg is released from the ovary. At this time, if the egg does not become fertilized by a sperm, the lining of the uterus will shed (this is your period).

Symptoms which might accompany a period

Period pain is common, and most people will experience it at some point in their lives. This usually feels like a muscle cramp in the lower tummy. It is important to know what is normal for you and if you have any changes or intense discomfort it is always good to ask your GP.

Some symptoms can also happen in the cycle before your period starts. This is often called PMT/PMS. This happens because your hormone levels are changing. It can cause you to be more bloated, irritable, have mood swings, breast tenderness, or changes in your skin and hair. Not everyone will experience this, and it usually passes after a day or two.

The menstrual cycle

1-7 days

Uterus lining breaks down, menstruation occurs

8-11 days

The lining of the womb thickens in preparation for the egg

12-17 days

Ovulation occurs (usually 12-16 days before next period)

18-25 days

If the egg is not fertilised by a sperm, the egg is reabsorbed into the body.

26-28 days

The uterine lining detaches leading to menstruation

Changes in your period?

It is important to know what your 'normal' is, some changes to your period are completely normal. Sometimes there can be changes in your period that you should get professional advice on.

These include:

- Bleeding between periods, after sex, or after menopause.
- Missed periods.
- Anything that you notice that is not what you know as normal, and that you are concerned about.

Remember to never be worried or embarrassed to speak to a nurse, GP, or doctor about anything that concerns you!

Resource: www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/lho/dublinse/social-inclusion/



What period products should I use?

This will depend on your preferences, and there are lots of choices on the market.

The main types are menstrual pads and tampons. These should be changed regularly and disposed of in a sanitary or waste bin. Newer more sustainable options include the reusable menstrual cup, and period pants which can be worn, washed and reused. Remember to use whatever products you are comfortable with!

Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)

TSS is a rare but life-threatening condition caused by an infection. It can happen if tampons or menstrual cups are left in the vagina too long, or from an infected wound. Symptoms develop quickly and you need urgent treatment.

Symptoms include:

A high temperature, muscle aches, a raised skin rash that feels like sandpaper, flu-like symptoms.

Prevention:

Change tampon/cup 4-6 hourly.

Stress

If you're stressed, your menstrual cycle can:

- Become longer or shorter
- Stop altogether
- Become more painful

Try to avoid becoming stressed by making sure you have time to relax. Regular exercise can help you relax. Breathing exercises can also help.

If you're finding it hard to cope with stress, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) may help. CBT is a talking therapy that can help you manage your problems by changing the way you think and act.

Self-care while on your period

Lots of girls and women find that their moods change right before and during their periods. Some find that they are more emotional or tearful. Doing something active that you enjoy or talking with a friend can really help.

If your 'blue mood' gets in the way of your daily life, or lasts for more than a couple days, it's important that you get help. Talk to your doctor for advice on supports. If you're a young person, talk to trusted adults such as parents and school counsellors/nurses who can help.

Exercise

Exercise is good, however, a dramatic increase in intensity can cause periods to stop. Intense physical activity can place stress on your body. This can affect the hormones responsible for your periods.

Losing too much body fat through intense exercise can stop you ovulating. You'll be advised to reduce your level of activity if excessive exercise has caused your periods to stop.

Exercise recommendations (minimum):

Aged 2-18, 60 minutes, x3 times per week
Aged 18-64, 30 minutes, x5 days per week
Aged 65+, 30 minutes, x5 days per week

Types of exercise:

It is important to do all types of exercise, from aerobic, strength building to flexibility. For those at risk of osteoporosis (particularly women) it is important to do weight bearing exercise which assists to build bone density.



Sexual health information

Sexual consent

It is not okay for a person to pressurise someone else to have sex.

You always have the legal right to choose; **if you have sex, when you have sex and what type of sex you want to engage in.** This applies whether you have sex with a new or existing partner.

At any point, both you and your partner have the right to change your mind and withdraw consent.

Resource: www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/sexual-consent/

Sexting or sending nudes

It is illegal for anyone (whatever their age) to post, send or share pictures of the genitalia of people under 18, or images of them engaged in sexual activity, as this is classified as child pornography. This is true even if a person under 18 sends a sexual picture of themselves. It is also illegal for someone to send 'sexually explicit' images to someone under 17, or to show pornography to someone under 18.

It is also illegal to take, distribute, publish or threaten to distribute/publish intimate images of somebody (of any age) without consent.

Drugs and alcohol can affect a person's ability to make decisions, including whether or not they want to have sex; this means they can't give consent.

What is the legal age of consent?

The law says that a person must be 17 years of age to be able to consent to engaging in a sexual act.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

A Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) is an infection that is passed on through sexual contact with someone who has an infection. The best protection is to use condoms properly every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex (use condoms/dental dams).

If you have symptoms of an STI or need urgent support, you should contact your local STI clinic or GP.

Resource: www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/hse-sti-services-in-ireland.html

HPV vaccine

HPV stands for 'human papillomavirus', which is a group of more than 100 viruses. HPV is spread mainly by skin to skin contact. Genital HPV infections are usually associated with sexual contact. HPV causes 1 in 20 cancers worldwide. It is one of the leading causes of cervical cancer. HPV vaccination offered at 1st year of secondary school (9-13 yrs) is a very effective way to reduce your risk of genital warts and developing HPV-associated cancer in the future.

STI testing

- Free home STI testing
- Order online
- Test at home
- Clinical support by phone

Resource: www.sh24.ie

What is Cervical Screening? (Smear test)

A cervical screening test is a free test to check the health of your cervix. Once you sign up to Cervical Check, you will get a letter at **25 years old**. You will be asked to ring your GP to book in for your free test. The sample of cervix cells is taken. A speculum and a swab is used in this procedure. It's not a test for cancer, it's a test to see if you are at risk of developing cancer.

Resource: www.cervicalcheck.ie

Free contraception

Free contraception is available to women, girls, trans and non-binary people who meet the relevant criteria.

Resource: www.sexualwellbeing.ie

