

ARISE NOTES: MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE

Definition

Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) encompasses the broad aspects of menstrual health, including:

- Physical aspects of menstruation
- Social aspects of menstruation
- Psychological aspects of menstruation
- Practices related to managing menstruation in a healthy and dignified way

The Menstruation Process

Menstruation, commonly referred to as a period, is a natural biological process that occurs in the female reproductive system. It is part of the menstrual cycle, which prepares the body for potential pregnancy each month.

Phases of the Menstrual Cycle

Phase 1: Menstrual Phase (Days 1-5)

Shedding of the Uterine Lining

- The cycle begins with menstruation
- The uterine lining (endometrium), along with blood and mucus, exits the body through the vagina

Duration: Typically lasts 3-7 days, but can vary among individuals

Phase 2: Follicular Phase (Days 1-13)

Hormonal Changes

- The hypothalamus signals the pituitary gland to release follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH)

Follicle Development

- FSH stimulates the growth of follicles in the ovaries
- Each follicle contains an immature egg (ovum)

Estrogen Production

- As follicles grow, they produce estrogen
- Estrogen helps rebuild the uterine lining that was shed during menstruation

Phase 3: Ovulation (Day 14)

LH Surge

- Around the middle of the cycle, a surge in luteinizing hormone (LH) triggers ovulation

Release of the Egg

- The dominant follicle releases a mature egg into the fallopian tube
- The egg awaits fertilization by sperm

Fertile Window

- This phase marks the most fertile period of the cycle
- Usually occurs about 14 days before the next period starts

Phase 4: Luteal Phase (Days 15-28)

Corpus Luteum Formation

- After ovulation, the empty follicle transforms into the corpus luteum

Progesterone Production

- The corpus luteum secretes progesterone
- Progesterone stabilizes the uterine lining and prepares it for potential implantation

If Pregnancy Does Not Occur

- The corpus luteum breaks down
- Progesterone levels drop

Preparation for Menstruation

- The decline in progesterone signals the body to shed the uterine lining
- This leads to menstruation and the start of a new cycle

Key Hormones Involved

1. **Estrogen:** Promotes the growth of the uterine lining during the follicular phase
2. **Progesterone:** Stabilizes the uterine lining and supports early pregnancy
3. **Follicle-Stimulating Hormone (FSH):** Stimulates the growth of ovarian follicles
4. **Luteinizing Hormone (LH):** Triggers ovulation and the release of a mature egg

Menstrual Cycle Length

- **Average Cycle:** About 28 days
- **Normal Range for Adults:** 21 to 35 days
- **Normal Range for Young Teens:** 21 to 45 days
- **Variability:** It is normal for the length and symptoms to vary among individuals and from month to month

Risks of Poor Menstrual Hygiene Management

1. Infections

- **Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs):** Poor hygiene can lead to infections like bacterial vaginosis
- **Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs):** Common if menstrual products are not changed regularly
- **Yeast Infections:** Caused by imbalance of natural flora in the vagina

2. Skin Irritations and Rashes

- **Contact Dermatitis:** Prolonged use of damp or soiled menstrual products causes redness, itching, and discomfort
- **Allergic Reactions:** Some individuals may react to materials in menstrual products

3. Psychological and Social Impact

- **Embarrassment and Shame:** Poor hygiene can lead to reduced self-esteem
- **Social Isolation:** Girls may avoid school or social interactions during their periods

4. Reproductive Health Issues

- **Fertility Problems:** Chronic infections can lead to reproductive health issues
- **Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID):** Untreated infections can cause chronic pain, ectopic pregnancy, and infertility

5. Increased Risk of Cervical Cancer

- Poor hygiene can exacerbate the risk of HPV infections, linked to cervical cancer

Cultural Beliefs on Menstruation

Positive Cultural Beliefs

- 1. Rites of Passage:** Some cultures celebrate menarche (first period) as a significant milestone
- 2. Fertility and Life:** Menstruation viewed as a symbol of fertility and ability to create life
- 3. Spiritual Purification:** Seen as a time of spiritual purification and renewal

Negative Cultural Beliefs

- 1. Menstrual Taboos and Stigma:** Menstruation seen as dirty or shameful
- 2. Isolation and Exclusion:** Menstruating women isolated from normal activities
- 3. Menstrual Myths:** Various harmful misconceptions

Common Myths About Menstruation (DEBUNKED)

Myth	Fact
Menstruation is unclean or dirty	Menstruation is a natural, healthy biological process
Menstruating women should avoid certain foods	No foods need to be avoided during menstruation
Menstruating women should not enter religious places	This is a cultural practice, not a health requirement
Menstruation attracts wild animals	There is no scientific evidence for this
Women cannot exercise during menstruation	Exercise is safe and can help relieve cramps
Menstrual blood stops in water	Menstrual flow continues in water
Tampons can get lost inside the body	Tampons cannot get lost; the cervix blocks them
Menstruating women should avoid swimming	Swimming during menstruation is perfectly safe
You can't get pregnant during menstruation	Pregnancy is possible, though less likely

Emotional and Psychological Effects of Menstruation

Common Effects

1. **Mood Swings:** Rapid changes in mood
2. **Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS):** Irritability, anxiety, depression, fatigue, sleep changes
3. **Depression and Anxiety:** Heightened feelings of sadness or anxiety
4. **Fatigue and Low Energy:** Feeling unusually tired
5. **Decreased Concentration and Memory:** Difficulty focusing
6. **Body Image Issues:** Negative feelings about appearance due to bloating or acne

Managing These Effects

1. **Education and Awareness:** Understanding what's happening in your body
2. **Healthy Lifestyle Choices:** Exercise, balanced diet, adequate sleep
3. **Stress Management Techniques:** Relaxation, meditation, deep breathing
4. **Professional Help:** Consult a healthcare provider if symptoms are severe
5. **Support Systems:** Talk to family, friends, or counselors

Menstrual Hygiene Best Practices

1. **Change menstrual products regularly** (every 4-6 hours for pads, 4-8 hours for tampons)
2. **Wash hands** before and after changing products
3. **Clean the genital area** with water regularly
4. **Use clean, dry underwear**
5. **Dispose of used products properly**
6. **Avoid scented products** that can cause irritation
7. **Keep track of your cycle** to be prepared