



Supporting *your child with* difficult periods

It can be hard to know how to help if your child, or a child you care for, is experiencing painful and/or heavy periods.

Here's how to support their physical and emotional wellbeing, both at home and in school.

Seek medical advice

Consult a GP if:

- Period pain affects your child's daily life, lasts more than 2-3 days each cycle or requires regular pain relief.
- Your child has heavy menstrual bleeding, such as needing to change period products, (pads, tampons, menstrual cups, period pants) every one to two hours or needing to use two period products at the same time.
- Your child has very irregular periods or missed periods where they do not have a bleed for several months at a time.
- Your child has pain when doing a poo or a wee
- They experience significant mental distress around their period.



How can my child's GP help?

GPs can check for infections and arrange for your child to have scans and tests to investigate your child's symptoms. They may look for or try to rule out conditions such as endometriosis, polyendocrine metabolic ovarian syndrome or PMOS (previously known as PCOS), Heavy menstrual bleeding (HMB), irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or fibroids. GPs can help with symptom management including prescribing painkillers. They may also start hormone treatments.

If your symptoms persist ask for a referral to gynaecology or specialist services. Specialist services can confirm diagnosis which helps to tailor treatment and improve quality of life. For more information on menstrual conditions, see signposted websites at the end of this leaflet.

Keeping a record of symptoms

Keep a period diary that records:

- The date the period starts and when it finishes
- Physical symptoms such as bloating, tender breasts, headaches, and tiredness.
- Mood symptoms such as irritability, mood swings, anxiety, and brain fog.
- Details about flow, for example, how often do they need to change their period products.
- Pain levels throughout their cycle, for example, does it come and go, whether pain relief helps. It may be helpful to use word descriptions of pain such as stabbing, burning, cramping, aching, as well as levels using words such as mild, moderate, severe, or a scale of 1-10.



This will help the GP to understand the full picture. This can be done on paper, in phone notes or using a period tracker app.



Arm them with knowledge

- Let them know that the average menstrual cycle is 28 days, but it's normal for a cycle to be short, long or irregular well into the teenage years.
- Explain what a normal period can look like, but also that everyone is different. Normal periods last between two and seven days, but usually about five days, and bleeding is heaviest in the first couple of days. The blood is red but can be pink or brown on lighter days.
- Discuss ways to express pain levels so that they can communicate what they feel. For example:
 - Mild might be cramping or aching that they notice but can ignore or are able to manage with over-the-counter pain relief
 - Severe might be pain that affects daily life, affects daily life and concentration, makes them feel sick or dizzy and stops them taking part in activities.

It's important that pain is not dismissed, downplayed or 'pushed through'.



Create a safe, open space to talk

- Encourage open conversations about periods without shame or embarrassment. Explain that periods can be a taboo subject but that there is no reason for them to be as they're a normal part of being human. Discussing personal experiences of periods can be helpful as well as being open about using period products rather than concealing them.
- Use clear, age-appropriate language, validate their experiences and ask if they have any questions.

Let them know that it's OK to talk about pain, heavy bleeding, mood changes or worries.



Build a comfort and care toolkit

This can be for home or put in a small bag for school.

- Heat pad or mini hot water bottle.
- Over-the-counter pain relief. Follow medical advice and educate your child on when and how to take them if the school doesn't administer them – writing this down can be helpful as well as packing a pen to record when they took a dose.
- Comfortable period products that suit their needs (pads, period pants, menstrual cups, tampons).
- Spare underwear and clothing.



Advocate for them at school

Your child may feel unable to speak up at school and so putting things in place to help them is important. Discuss this with your child before you approach the school.

- Speak to teachers and school staff about any adjustments needed and ask for this to be done discreetly and without drawing attention to your child.
- Request access to toilets during lessons and rest breaks, discuss how participation in PE will be managed and request permission to carry supplies.
- If your child misses lessons or days at school because of their period, speak to the school about whether slides or resources can be sent home. This may not be logistically possible, but it's worth asking whether missed time can be supported in some way.
- Ask for a trusted adult to be assigned as someone your child can seek out if they're struggling and need support.

- You can ask for a 'letter of support' from your GP, stating that your child has heavy and/or painful periods that may require adjustments in school. This is not a 'sick note' or diagnosis (if they don't have one) but it can help to validate the information you're providing. This can be especially helpful if a school does not fully co-operate with your requests.



Empower their independence

- Involve them in decisions about period products and pain management.
- Teach them how to change period products, ask for more when they're running out, track symptoms and understand what's normal for their body.
- Encourage them to speak up about discomfort or concerns. While periods are normal, pain and heavy bleeding is not something that should be tolerated or normalised.

Support their emotional wellbeing

- Validate that menstrual symptoms can affect mood and confidence, as well as being physically difficult.
- Encourage rest without guilt.
- Promote enjoyable, low-pressure activities that help with stress.
- Remind them that all bodies are different and that what they're experiencing is not their fault.
- Celebrate their strength and resilience.

For more information...

Endometriosis: endometriosis-uk.org

PCOS: www.verity-pcos.org.uk

Heavy or painful periods: nhs.uk

Menstrual conditions: reproductive-health.ed.ac.uk/hope



ENDOMETRIOSIS^{UK}