

## May 28 – Menstrual Hygiene Day

World Menstrual Hygiene Day is observed every year on May 28. The 28th day of the month was chosen because 28 represents the “28-day cycle,” which is considered the average, normal menstrual cycle, while the month of May, the 5th month of the year, symbolizes the typical duration of a normal menstrual bleeding.

This year, the Institute of Public Health initiated, for the first time, a campaign aimed at educating girls in primary schools. The education focuses on understanding and caring for their bodies, puberty, the upcoming menstrual cycle, and hygiene during that period. Currently, this campaign will expand to include educational lectures in secondary schools as well.

Menstrual bleeding marks the beginning of physiological maturity in every adolescent girl and becomes part of her life until menopause. Girls typically experience their first menstruation, also called menarche, at around 12 years of age, although the average age is gradually decreasing.

The growth of breasts and pubic hair signals the period when the first menstrual cycle is expected. Girls should be informed about when they might expect their first menstruation. It usually occurs about two years after the onset of breast development and approximately six months to a year after the appearance of vaginal discharge.

A regular cycle, meaning bleeding occurs once a month on average every 28 days, is expected two to three years after the first menstruation. The menstrual period usually lasts 3–5 days. In some girls, bleeding may last 7–10 days, which is also considered normal at the beginning.

A normal menstrual cycle typically lasts 28 days. However, the duration of cycles can vary from 21 to 35 days in adult women and from 21 to 45 days in teenagers.

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is a normal part of the menstrual cycle and includes physical and emotional symptoms that occur just before menstruation, such as acne, bloating, fatigue, lower back pain, tender or swollen breasts, headaches, increased appetite, and irritability.

Menstrual education is a crucial process for understanding the biological, hygienic, and social aspects of the menstrual cycle, improving reproductive health. This education helps young girls understand their bodies, increases self-control, and fights prejudices associated with this natural phenomenon. Open discussion is essential for its implementation. Education should be open, accessible, and provided from an early age.

### Key aspects of menstrual education:

- **Understanding the cycle:** Learning about the phases of the menstrual cycle, its duration, and hormonal changes.
- **Hygiene and products:** Becoming familiar with menstrual hygiene products (pads, tampons, menstrual cups) and their proper use.
- **Fighting stigma:** Breaking the shame and prejudices often associated with menstruation.
- **Health aspects:** Recognizing symptoms that deviate from normal and caring for reproductive health.

## Menstrual Phase

The menstrual phase lasts approximately from the 1st to the 6th day of the cycle. During this phase, the uterus continuously contracts to shed the upper layer of its lining. This causes monthly bleeding, known as menstruation or the menstrual period. These contractions often cause abdominal pain or cramps in many women. Light movement or relaxation exercises can help. Support your body with proper nutrition.

### Recommended foods:

- **Iron-rich:** lentils, spinach, beets, red meat
- **Magnesium:** bananas, dark chocolate, nuts
- **Hydration:** plenty of water or warm teas (e.g., ginger tea)
- **Omega-3 fatty acids:** chia seeds, flax seeds, walnuts (help with inflammation and pain)

### Foods to avoid:

- Sugary drinks, processed foods, and salty foods, as they increase bloating.

## Follicular Phase

The follicular phase lasts approximately from the 7th to the 13th day of the cycle, during which the egg follicle matures in the ovaries. At the same time, the uterine lining gradually renews itself so that the egg can implant there if fertilization occurs. During this phase, the body often has more energy and endurance.

### Recommended foods:

- **Protein:** eggs, chicken, quinoa
- **Complex carbohydrates:** oats, quinoa, brown rice
- **Vegetables and fruits:** broccoli, apples, kiwi, blueberries
- **Fermented products:** yogurt, kefir, which also support digestion

## Ovulation

Ovulation occurs around the 14th day of a 28-day cycle: the follicle's shell bursts, and the egg moves through one of the fallopian tubes toward the uterus. A woman's fertile days start four to five days before ovulation. The fertile phase ends approximately one to two days after ovulation. If fertilization does not occur, the egg dies and is expelled from the body along with the uterine lining during the next menstrual period.

During ovulation, energy, strength, motivation, and hormone levels reach their peak. You feel very energetic.

### Recommended foods:

- Light and fresh foods: salads and seasonal fruits

- Antioxidant-rich foods: berries, tomatoes, red peppers
- Foods high in zinc and B vitamins: pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, whole grains

### Luteal Phase

The final phase of the female cycle is the luteal phase, which roughly corresponds to the second half of the cycle. The luteinizing hormone from the follicle forms the corpus luteum, which produces the hormone progesterone. This causes the uterine lining to thicken in preparation for receiving a fertilized egg. If fertilization does not occur, the corpus luteum recedes, and the uterine lining is gradually shed.

Many women feel tired and drained during this period. Motivation decreases, as does the body's readiness to be active. This becomes particularly noticeable in the days leading up to the end of the cycle, when premenstrual syndrome (PMS) occurs.

### Recommended foods:

- **Complex carbohydrates:** sweet potatoes, chickpeas, oats (help regulate mood)
- **Vitamin B6 and magnesium:** bananas, avocado, seeds, nuts, dark chocolate (70%+) – improves mood
- **Fatty fish:** mackerel, salmon, tuna, sardines (anti-inflammatory effect)

### Foods to avoid:

- Large amounts of caffeine and sugar
- Excessively salty snacks, as they increase water retention

### Hygiene

It is important to establish good hygiene habits, which include guidance on maintaining personal hygiene, proper use of menstrual products, and regular replacement. Wearing pads for too long creates favorable conditions for the development of infections.

Menstrual hygiene products provide freshness and comfort during the cycle. The main options include sanitary pads (daily and menstrual), tampons, menstrual cups, period underwear, and specialized intimate gels for support. These products vary in size, absorbency, and materials.

### The most common menstrual hygiene products:

- **Sanitary pads (menstrual pads):** Traditional products that stick to underwear, available in different sizes and absorbency levels.
- **Tampons:** Inserted vaginally, available in different sizes for varying flow days.
- **Daily liners:** Smaller pads for everyday protection of underwear.
- **Menstrual cups:** Eco-friendly, reusable, inserted vaginally.
- **Period underwear:** Reusable underwear that absorbs menstrual blood.
- **Intimate gels for menstrual support:** Products that help maintain hygiene and freshness.

When choosing a product, it is important to consider your body's specific needs, comfort, and activity level.

Through education and support, we create an environment where every girl and woman can feel safe and accepted. Open conversations reduce stigma and encourage girls and women to take care of their health.