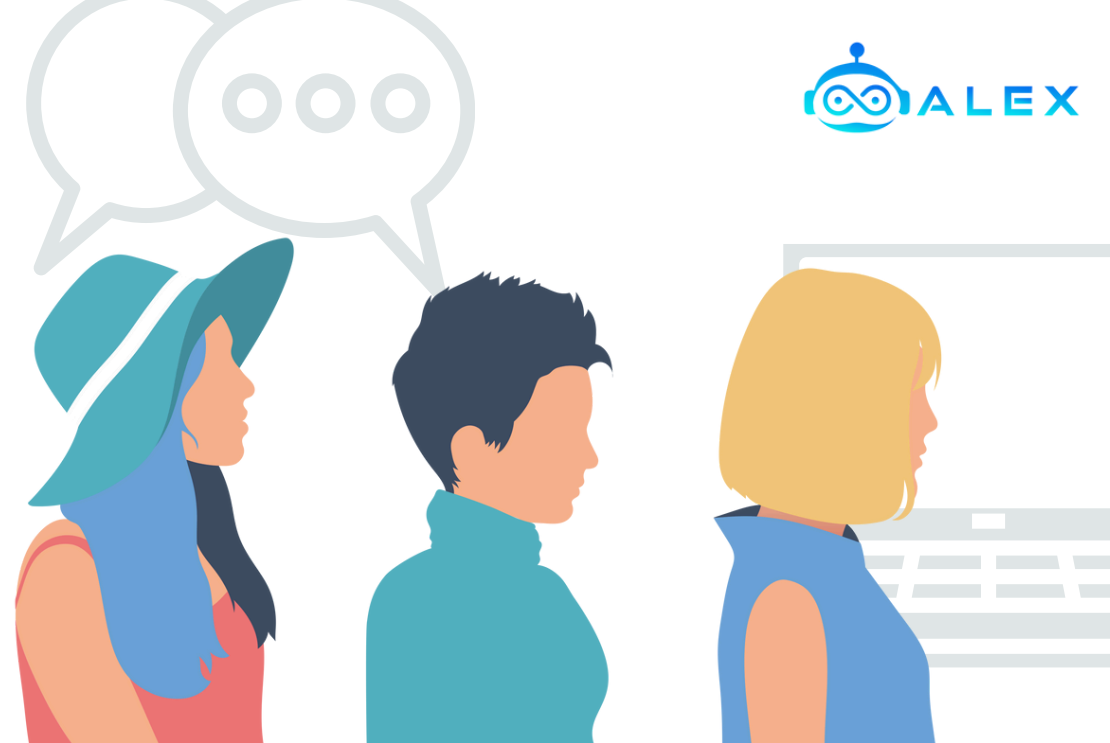


## MY CHANGING BODY

# What should a period be like?

KEY WORDS

genitalia | hygiene | penis | vagina



Regular monthly bleeding is usually a constant companion in a woman's life up to a certain age. It's also a message being sent from our bodies: "In this cycle, you haven't conceived, but it's still possible in the future," as the presence of menstruation indicates that the hormonal system is functioning reasonably well.

The first menstruation usually occurs between the ages of **11 and 13**. Initially, it's often light, resembling spotting, and irregular and unpredictable, but it typically normalises after about 2-3 years.



Over time, menstruations become heavier and tend to occur approximately **every 28 days**. However, there are women who menstruate **more frequently**, for example, every 23 days, or less frequently, such as every 32 days. If this happens regularly for an extended period, it should be considered normal. The longest cycle, however, should not exceed **35 days**, and the shortest one that can still be considered "healthy" is **21 days**.

Once in a while your menstrual cycle might be slightly shorter or longer. Such occasional "shifts" can be associated with:

- hormonal fluctuations caused by intense stress or fatigue
- travel
- changes in sleeping, working or studying schedule
- intense weight loss

It is generally accepted that the average menstrual period lasts **about 7 days**. A period lasting less than **3 days** is considered too short, which could be indicative of hormonal imbalances or a drastic diet. An excessively long period may also be a sign of health issues.

Some young women start with spotting, while others experience intense bleeding right away. This is normal and not something to worry about.



The colour of menstrual blood should be bright red, without large clots or clumps, and after two days, it should darken. Smaller clots may appear along with the blood. A typical symptom during menstruation is pain in the lower abdomen.

You can **alleviate the pain** in several ways:

- use warm compresses from a hot-water bottle and warming, relaxing baths, but no longer than 20 minutes
- opt for light physical activity
- take menstrual pain tablets

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So, when it comes to periods, don't be shy about talking openly about your 'time of the month', whether it's with friends, family, or even a healthcare professional like a gynaecologist if you have concerns about bleeding, pain or anything else.

Let's prioritise making sure we feel comfortable and informed about our own health. What's normal can vary from person to person – and that's totally fine!

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