

This book tells the story of young Ugandan girls.



GROWING UP AT SCHOOL



A GUIDE TO MENSTRUAL MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOL GIRLS



By Annie Kanyemba



It's all normal:

- If some girls become rude and stubborn when they have their MPs.
- If a girl gets her period when she is still young, such as 9, 10 or 11. Or when she is a bit older such as 16 to 18 years.
- If sometimes a girl will get clots coming out with her period.
- If girls get pimples just before or during their period.
- If a girl get waterlike or white discharge right before or af-ter her period.
- If a girl gets stomach pains during her period.
- If girls do not get their period every month.
- If a girl's period only lasts for a day or 2days.
- If you get your period for three days and your friend gets hers for five days.
- If you get breast pains when you are growing up.
- If you feel shy when you have your period.



Girls share their stories with each other

© Annie Kanyemba, 2011

All rights reserved: no part of this publication may be reproduced, without the prior written permission of the author.

Author: Annie Kanyemba
 Stories by: Girls of Uganda
 Translator: Brenda Achiro Muthemba, Grace Orishaba NETWAS (U)
 Photographs: Annie Kanyemba
 Layout and design: Peter Morgan, Annie Kanyemba

Dedication:

I dedicate this work to my late mother Beauty Matemayi.

Acknowledgements:

Special thanks go to NETWAS Uganda, with support from the EcoSanRes project, Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) for supporting the documentation of experiences and compilation of this book. Particularly I wish to thank Mrs. Brenda Achiro Muthemba for her help in initiating and assisting with this project. Many thanks also to Madeleine Fogde of the EcoSanRes project in Sweden.

Special thanks also goes to the Ministry of Education and Sports in Uganda for showing interest in the book and offering constructive guidance in its compilation.

I also wish to thank Marni Sommer for inspiring me to write this book for Ugandan school girls. Her booklet for school girls in Tanzania was used as a model for this booklet. Special thanks also to Peter Morgan, for all the help and encouragement he has given me. Thanks also to the various schools and institutions in Uganda for their co-operation- Muteesa Primary, Naguru Police Barracks Quarters, Afripad Uganda and Girls' Education Movement Uganda.

A brief introduction

This booklet has been written to help school girls manage the critical period when they enter adolescence between the ages of 10 and 14. Adolescence is the time during which boys and girls grow from childhood into adulthood and changes take place in their bodies. During this period, known as puberty, menstruation starts in girls.

We believe this booklet will help in breaking stigma associated with menstruation among school girls. School Management Committees, School Health Clubs, science and senior women teachers are all encouraged to support the girl child to understand and cope with having menses in school.

Menstruation

Menstruation is commonly called a **period or MPs (Menstrual Periods)**. Menstruation is basically the monthly discharge of blood from the uterus through the vagina of non pregnant girls and woman from



Mrs. Achiro Brenda talks to some of the girls in Muteesa P/S on their experiences

Keep a check on period times

Always keep track of how long you have had your period, when it starts and when it ends and how heavy the flow is. You count 26–28 days after the first day of your last period. So if your period started on June 1st, you can expect it again between June 26th and June 28th. If your period lasts for more than 10 days, visit your nearest clinic.



Girls study their Menstrual calendar

Disposing or keeping the pads

During your period, always make sure you dispose of your sanitary materials (cloths/ pads/ tissues/cotton) in a pit latrine or (Blair VIP). If you are to reuse the cloth and you are at school, carefully fold the cloth and put it in a plastic bag before you put it in your school bag then when you get home wash it with hot water and soap, make sure you dry it in the sunshine and iron it if you can.



Fossa Alterna spiral toilet in Muteesa P/S

Building up your confidence (self esteem)

What is self esteem?

This is the opinion you have about yourself. In other words, it is your general assessment or judgment of your own worth.

1. Accept yourself for who you are.
2. There is only one like you.
3. Walk proud
4. Focus on your positive attributes and traits
5. Develop your weakness
6. Use your personal talents and skills to help you socialize and interact with other people

To do with knowledge, self assurance, knowing what to do, coping with life.



puberty to menopause (when menstruation stops in older women). The menstruation or bleeding, usually lasts from about three to seven days. However some girls' bleeding may last longer than seven days. The whole menstrual process or cycle takes about 28 days from the first day of your MPs. In a few cases, girls may have cycles that last for as many as 34 days or as few as 19 days.

During the first two years after the first menstruation starts, the periods may not occur every month (regularly). **This is normal.** Menstruation is entirely normal. All girls will experience menstruation and will have to learn how to live with it for many years of their life. There are many ways to make it easier to cope with.



Menstruation can be uncomfortable, painful and embarrassing, but there are many ways of coping.

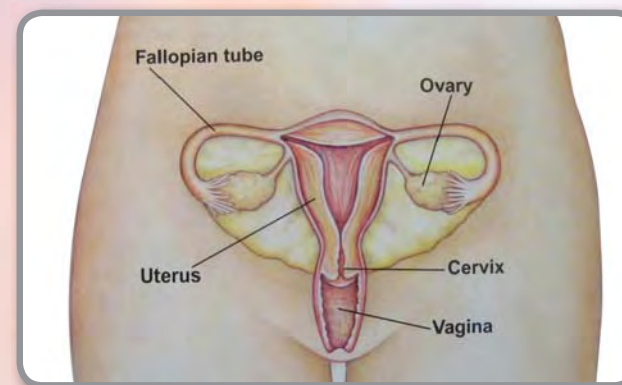


Diagram of the female reproductive system

When does it start?

In most cases, girls experience their first menstruation between the ages of 9 to 15. However there are times whereby some start earlier than nine years or later than 15 years. During the menstrual period, there is a flow of blood from the vagina and often “cramps” or pain may be experienced as well. Sanitary pads are used to absorb the blood and stop soiling of cloths.



What is Pre-Menstrual Syndrome?

This is a mixture of emotional, physical and mood disturbances that occur a few days before the start of a girl's period. The most common mood related symptoms are getting angry quickly, crying, and feeling happy and sad at the same time. The common physical symptoms include fatigue, bloating, pimples and appetite changes with need for more food. Exercising and eating a healthy diet may help reduce the effects of these symptoms.



Girls sharing their experiences with menstruation

Exercises (deep breathing and stretching)

We breath all the time to keep us alive. Normally these are shallow breaths unless we are exercising. But deep breathing, that is deliberately breathing deeply can help us relax and feel better. To do this you have to concentrate on breathing.

Go to a quiet place and make yourself comfortable in a chair and close your eyes. Listen to the world outside. Then breath in deeply – as far as you can so your lungs are full. Then breath out all the way. Continue breathing deeply in and out for a full minute. That is about 12 breaths. Then keep breathing deeply but more slowly. Breath in and hold for ten seconds and then breath out. Breathe in again and hold your lungs full for 10 seconds. And breathe out again slowly. Repeat ten times. This should make you feel more relaxed and comfortable. Each time you practice you will benefit more. Deep breathing and drinking plenty of water will make you feel better and more relaxed and comfortable.

Stretching exercises

For the body to work at its best, the muscles like to be stretched. When we practice sports we stretch our muscles and we feel better for it. This helps our bodies. Doing stretching every day helps us feel better.



Mood Swings

Inform those you are close to if you are feeling moody so that they may know how to deal with you. Part of maturing is to learn how to manage your moods.



Learn to relax

Learn to relax and not stress out about your period, stress can affect your flow and/or your cycle. So don't worry about your Menstrual Periods, other girls go through the same experience, you are not alone!



Laughter is the best medicine

Tell a good story, share funny thoughts and feelings. Laughter is one of the best medicines known.



Body changes in girls during puberty

- Height and weight increase
- Breasts develop
- Hips and waist become more defined,
- Muscles become stronger
- Body hair grows in the private area and under the arms pits,
- Pimples may develop,
- Sweat and oils glands become more active
- Body odour changes
- Reproductive system matures
- Menstruation begins
- Mood changes may occur.



School girls tell their stories

Story 1— Buganda (Central region)

The day I started menstruating I was at home. I had a terrible headache and stomach pains so I went to sleep. I then went to the toilet and realised there was blood on my knickers, I was scared and I actually thought my mother was going to beat me up because I did not know what it was. So I went to tell my older friends and they told me what it was and how to manage it. I then went to my mother and told her and she bought me sanitary pads but before the pads came, I used my knickers to hold the blood and I would keep on changing the knickers. Now my friends and uncle help me to access the sanitary pads. I throw the used ones in our pit latrine.



A good diet helps

A good healthy diet helps to make the time during menstruation more comfortable and manageable. Drink lots of water and eat plenty of fruit and vegetables. You can also take in a lot of potassium which is found in bananas.



Spinach — helps to restore the blood

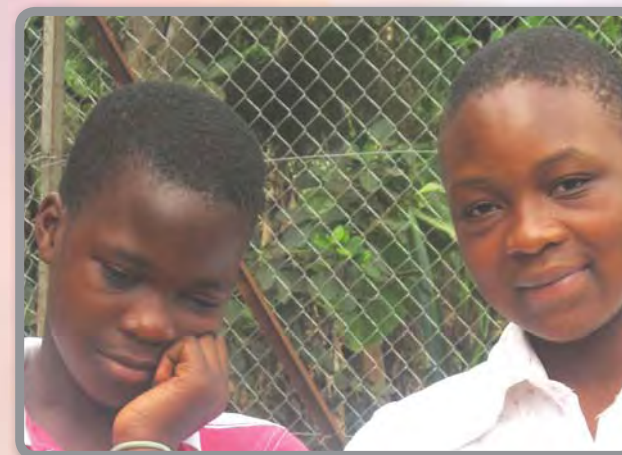
Some vegetables are particularly valuable. Spinach is one. It is easy to grow and contains lots of fibre. It cleanses the blood and contains lots of iron. Iron is needed in the formation of new blood. When blood is lost in the periods, new blood must be made in the body to replace it. That is why green vegetables like spinach can help so much.



Spinach is
good for the
blood!

Story 2— Gishu (Eastern Region)

I was travelling to my aunt's place when it happened, at first I did not know what was coming because it just came when I was not prepared but the flow was not heavy so I did not spoil my clothes. On reaching my aunt's place I borrowed pads from my cousin, since I was taught in primary school on how to use the pads I sorted myself. Whenever I am in my period I feel pain, the second day is worse but I do not take pain killers because I heard that pain killers causes fertility challenges. I stay with my sister who's a police constable so sometimes she buys me the pads but other times I have to save money from my transport fee and walk instead so that I can buy myself sanitary pads. I dispose of my used pads into our pit latrine.

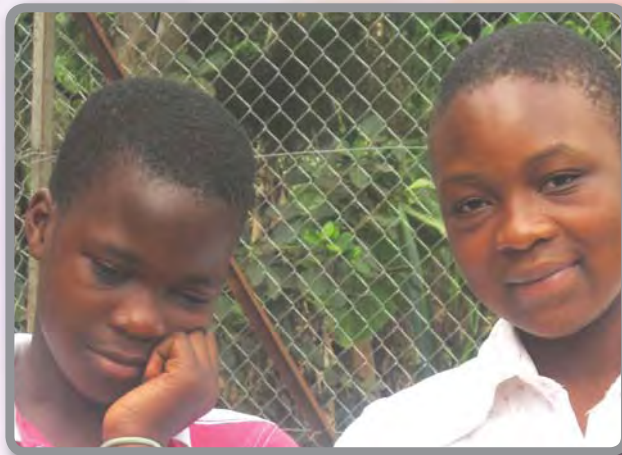


Story 3— Teso (Eastern Region)

My first menstruation started when I was at school in class. I stood in class and my friend told me I had spoiled my skirt, I did not know what it was and I was scared and embarrassed. My friend took me to the toilet and explained to me what it was. She gave



me a pad and taught me how to stick it to my knickers; she also gave me her jersey to tie around my waist to cover the stain on my skirt. I was scared of going back to the class so I stayed behind my class until it was time to go back to the dormitories, as I live in a boarding school. I stayed with the pad all day and my friend came to my dormitory and asked if I had changed the pad, I had not because I did not know that I was supposed to change it so she told me to change it and that I should always carry some extra with me to change every few hours. When I went to the toilet to change I was shocked at what I saw this pad



was full of blood and it was gross. I also experienced pain especially abdominal and back pain but I did not take pain killers, I just stuck with the pain until my period was finished.

Period pains and their management

If you suffer from period pains, you can lessen them by having a healthy diet, exercising, or even putting a hot water bottle (or plastic bottle filled with hot water) on your stomach area when you are resting. Also taking a hot bath helps. Painkillers (aspirin, ibuprofen, paracetamol, panados, etc) are also good in reducing the pain. Some traditional herbs are known also to alleviate the pain, herbs like “mubiri, Bomboo, Mwetaugo” can help. Hot water bottles, pills, and exercise can help.

Ensuring personal hygiene

When a girl is having her menstruation, the body undergoes a lot of metabolism with release of blood, as well as sweat from other parts of the body. It is therefore very important to keep clean to avoid infections.

Girls can keep clean by frequent bathing (twice or thrice a day). Used knickers and under wears have to be washed daily with soap and water and ensure they dry thoroughly before putting them on again. 5 to 10 litres of water per bath would be recommended. After every bath, a clean and dry knicker and pad or piece of cloth should be used, this helps feel clean and safe.

Managing the pain: A hot water bottle can help the pain

Heat treatment can help relax the muscles and also the pain during menstruation. Laying a hot water bottle on your stomach can help. Also bottles filled with hot water will work if you do not have a water bottle. Pills like panadol can also be used to help reduce the pain.

Wear Comfortable Clothing

Wear comfortable clothes like a skirt inside your uniform and always keep your sweater around in case you stain your uniform. When that happens, you can just tie it around your waist. If you have to change for sports in school, wear red, black or brown knickers so that people will not notice that you are having your period.



Comfortable cloths can help!

Story 4— Lango (Northern Region)

When I started my period I was in class and when I stood up, the boys started laughing at me. I did not know what was going on. I was shocked and embarrassed then a friend of mine gave me a sweater to tie on my waist. She then accompanied me to see the senior woman teacher who explained everything to me and gave me soap to wash my spoiled uniform and told me to go home. I went home and told my mother about it, I was in a lot of pain so my mother took me to the hospital for medicine. I spent the next three days at home because I was afraid and embarrassed to go back to school because I thought the boys would keep on laughing at me. The following week I went back to school and they started teaching about Menstrual Periods.

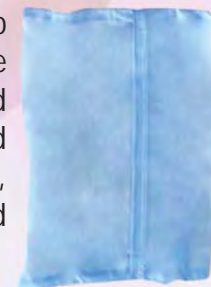


Story 5— Lango (Northern Region)

My period started when I was playing at school, I felt that my knickers were wet and then I went to the toilet and checked myself, I saw blood, tied a sweater around myself so no one could see that my skirt was spoilt. I then went home and told my mother and she bought me some pads but never told me anything on how to put them on so I had to go and ask a friend who advised me on what to do and what menstruation was all about. We later had a counselling meeting for all the girls at school. I did feel abdominal pain but I did not use painkillers instead I use a hot water bottle. The pain affected my concentration in class, so instead I did not talk I just wrote notes.



Storage Bags: The storage bag is a private place to keep your soiled pads if you're at school or don't have time to wash them immediately. Soiled pads should be removed from the pad holder rolled up, and placed inside the plastic storage bag. When it's convenient, remove the soiled pads from the storage bag and wash them.



Afripads Use & Care / Tips:

- Before using your AFRIpads for the first time, wash all of the pieces 1-2 times with soap. This will make the fabric more absorbent.
- Like disposable sanitary pads, put on a fresh AFRIpad when the old one is soiled, or as needed to feel comfortable.
- AFRIpads must be washed properly with clean water and soap.
- Hang AFRIpads to dry on a clothesline using a knicker peg or a safety pin. Drying them outside in direct sun is best, but if you prefer to dry them inside for privacy hang them near the window so they are exposed to fresh air.
- AFRIpads should be completely dry before wearing them again.

Advantages of AFRIpads:

- AFRIpads can be used for up to one year (12 menstrual cycles).
- AFRIpads are soft and comfortable.
- When you wear AFRIpads during your period, you feel free!
- AFRIpads are cost-saving so they help you save money.
- AFRIpads are good for the environment, unlike disposable sanitary pads.

Contact Information:
For more info, check out our
website at: www.afripads.com



Controlling the blood flow

Commercial pads

A pad is a soft piece of material worn under the panties to absorb the menstrual blood. These pads have a thin layer of plastic inside to keep the blood from going through the pad onto the panties. They also have a sticky surface to stick to the panties to keep it in place.

Locally made pads/ AFRIpads.

AFRIpads are cloth, washable sanitary pads that are used to manage menstrual flow. They are designed to be washed and re-used for up to a year (12 menstrual cycles). This makes AFRIpads a practical, cost-saving solution for managing your period.

AFRIpads are sold in combinations of the following pieces:

Pads: The pads are used to absorb the menstrual blood. The pads are made from soft, absorbent fabric, with a thin layer of plastic inside to keep the blood from leaking out. The pads come in 2 convenient shapes (straight + winged) to help you manage light and heavy flow.

Pad Holders: The pad holders are used to hold the pads into place in the knickers. The pad holders have wings that wrap around the center of the knickers and fasten together with a button. The button secures the AFRIpads and prevents them from falling out. The pad is made from a soft fabric and has a thin layer of plastic inside as extra protection against leaking.



A straight pad



A winged Pad



A Pad Holder

Boys Perspective and Experiences.

- It's a natural biological cycle of a girl
- It occurs on some dates which differ every now and then but in general after 26 to 29 days
- Girls feel insecure and they may suffer psychologically
- The spoiling of clothes around boys can make it worse so girls rather prefer to be alone when they are having their period.
- Sanitary pads are easily accessible to everyone and should be user friendly.
- The parents/guardians should try to face reality, it's not someone's fault or an inborn thing so they should feel normal and be realistic.
- It all begins with the parent who should make their child confident and comfortable so that when she goes to school she is more comfortable and secure with the subject.
- The school curriculum should encompass menstrual management. Menstrual education should be for both girls and boys so both are well informed.



When I was 8yrs old I used to play with my neighbour a girl who was 11yrs old. One day we were playing and she went to the toilet then I heard her scream. I ran to her then I saw that she had blood all over her I asked if she had hurt herself but she did not know. The parents were not around, it was just her and me so I helped her clean up the visible area,



her legs then I took her to the hospital. The doctors did something on her and gave me a written note to give to her parents. I was never told what had happened to her and she kept on avoiding the subject. I only got the story when we had a lecture on menstrual periods years later. That is when I was taught about menstrual management and understood that this is what had happened to my friend.

Managing your Periods

First of all: don't be afraid of having your period, it is completely natural and normal and it means you are healthy. Tell a parent/guardian. It would be better if you tell someone close to you so they can advise you on what to do or help you get through it. If you are embarrassed to tell someone, just think, every girl has to go through it. Remember: if you start before any of your friends then you're being a mature adult before them.

Once you start having your periods, it is advisable that you always keep your pad or cloth with you even if it's not that time of the month just in case.



Talking in groups with the teacher helps

Personal Hygiene

When you are having your periods, make sure you wash your private parts with water at least twice a day. This will reduce the risk of bad body odour and infections. Washing hands and body helps. Keeping clothes clean and well washed is important.



Drink plenty of clean water

