

# Menstruation and me

by Sheena Magenya

Alushe Gabriel

*The first time I got my menstruation, I was too scared to tell anyone. I thought it was something I had done that caused the flow of blood...Storm, De Duine Senior Secondary School*

*The first time I had my period I was 13, and I did not know anything. I didn't have any pain, there was only blood. I kept changing my clothes until my older sister noticed and told me what was going on. My mum knew, but was too shy to tell me. - Sofiana Silva*

*The first day I got my period was the worst day I have ever had in my life, because I was just 9 years old. I didn't even know what periods were or what to do about them. Mii – Swakopmund*

From OYO Magazine, Vol. 8 No. 2 March-April 2010: Page 10

**M**enstruation, Menses, The Curse, Period, Flow, That-time-of-the-month, Monthly Trip to the Moon or The Bleeding: No matter what name you give it, getting your period can be a scary time for a girl, especially when it is the first time. Fear, pain, guilt and sometimes excitement are emotions that you might experience.

It is also a scary time for your caregivers, because it is an indication that your body can support life, in other words: you can get pregnant. Naturally they want to protect you from this – but how, when sex is such a **taboo\*** subject? Remember – when they were young, no one spoke to our mothers, grannies and aunties about periods and sex. And they did not have magazines or the internet where they could find information. So they just dealt with it in the best way they could, or in a way that was traditionally accepted.

However - do not panic - help is at hand! The most important thing that you need to know is that menstruation is a natural phase or time in your life.

## What is a period?

Simply put, you experience your period in the form of blood coming out of your vagina. Most women get their periods once every month, while others get it at irregular intervals. Some girls start menstruating at the age of nine, others only at the age of 15, and most girls in between. Periods usually last between 4 to 7 days at a time, and the amount of blood that is shed (known as the 'flow') varies from light, to medium to heavy.

## Getting comfortable

For some girls, having their period can be a difficult and sometimes painful time. They experience nausea, dizziness, cramps and in some cases depression. Others may feel tenderness and discomfort in their breasts. Some even feel extreme pain, a condition called dysmenorrhoea for which you should seek medical advice.

Here are some tips on what you can do to make your period more comfortable:

- **Exercise:** Even though you might feel reluctant to exercise during your period, it is important to do so. Exercising leads to the releasing of endorphins, which are 'feel-good' hormones that take your mind off the discomfort you might be experiencing.
- **Massages:** If you suffer from abdominal cramps, you can either ask a friend to give you an abdominal massage using a warm towel, or do it yourself. You can also place a warm hot water bottle on your stomach to ease the pain or cramps.
- **Healthy diet:** Drinking plenty of water and eating healthy foods helps your body restore the minerals and water that are lost during your period. Failure to do this can lead to dizziness and nausea. Drinking herbal teas like Rooibos or Green Tea will help you relax, but avoid alcoholic drinks as they lead to **dehydration\***.

- **Clothing:** If you experience breast tenderness or discomfort, wear a more comfortable, softer bra. If you are brave enough to go without a bra - then the more power (and comfort) to you! Also wear comfortable cotton underwear. Synthetic materials and G-String panties can cause irritation and vaginal discomfort.
- **Attitude:** Change your attitude! Having your period is not a curse, and it is not dirty. It is a natural part of a girl's life, and we should embrace it!

### What to use...

I remember seeing sanitary pads adverts when I was younger and telling my mother that I needed to get pads for school, because my ink pen kept on blotting my pages! Of course, she just laughed and changed the topic. The adverts showed a woman's hand pouring blue ink onto a pad, and the pad absorbing all the ink!

There are numerous products in shops and supermarkets that girls and women can use. Sadly, as important as it is for women and girls to have access to sanitation facilities and devices, the price of pads and tampons remain ridiculously high, meaning that not all women can afford pads or tampons. Here are options that you can pick from, and that can suit your finances:

#### Pad/Sanitary pads

Price: N\$ 12 to N\$ 30

Sanitary pads are widely used, because they are cheap. Some women find them comfortable, because they are not inserted into the vagina like tampons. When full, they are taken off the panty and wrapped in toilet or plastic paper and disposed of, into a bin - don't block the toilet with it!

#### Tampons

Price: N\$ 18 to N\$ 46

Tampons are inserted into the vagina; when full, they are removed and can be flushed down the toilet. Some women prefer tampons, because they find them more discreet and easier to dispose of.

#### Cotton

Price: N\$ 5 to N\$ 20

For women and girls who cannot afford tampons or pads, pieces of cotton swabs that can be bought at the supermarket make a good alternative. They, however, have to be changed frequently to avoid 'accidents' where some blood stains your clothes. They can easily be flushed down the toilet or thrown into a pit toilet.

#### Cloth

Price: N\$ 0

This is an even cheaper option for women and girls who cannot afford pads, tampons or cotton. Thin strips of an old cotton sheet, towel or even dress are rolled into a thick wad and worn as a pad. When full the cloth 'pad' is removed and replaced with another one. The used pad can then be properly washed, dried and used again.

### Celebrate it!

If you realize that one of your friends is getting her period for the first time, show her this article and share what you know. Tell her what is happening and that there's nothing to be afraid of. It's the opposite! Let's celebrate our body and appreciate the fact that we can choose to give life when we are mature enough to take care for a child!

### SMS your views!!!

If you have any questions that you are too shy to ask your mother or auntie, you can write us a letter and we will answer your questions. We would love to hear from you. Our address is: P.O.Box 86753, Eros, Windhoek. You can also sms your questions to 081 462 9639 or email us at [sheena@sisternamibia.org](mailto:sheena@sisternamibia.org)



### Glossary

\***taboo** something which people may not do or speak about

\***dehydration** a condition where your body does not have enough water