

Menstrual Hygiene among Indian Urban- Rural Adolescent Girls - Problem, Hygiene and Disadvantages

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Abstract: *The Menstruation is a normal physiological process in adolescent girls which indicating about beginning of reproductive life of girls, but sometimes due to lack of knowledge it becomes a problematic phenomenon in the Indian society for adolescent girls. In India the menstrual hygiene mostly depends upon the girl's educational status, socioeconomic status, and cultural statuses of family. Some studies say that more number of girls from an urban area (56.2%) was using sanitary napkins during menstruation. Only around one-fourth of the girls in study area had ever been counseled for menstrual hygiene. Awareness about adolescent health clinic was significantly more among urban girls. Studies say Awareness in urban adolescent girls was more in comparison to rural girls. The usage of sanitary pads was similar in both rural and urban areas. Menstrual hygiene was better in urban than rural areas. It is imperative that adolescent girls be educated about the, significance of menstruation, and proper hygienic practices during menstruation. Sex education in school curriculum can help in resolving misconceptions about menstruation.*

Keywords: Menstrual Hygiene, Adolescent Girls, Hygiene and Disadvantages

1. Introduction

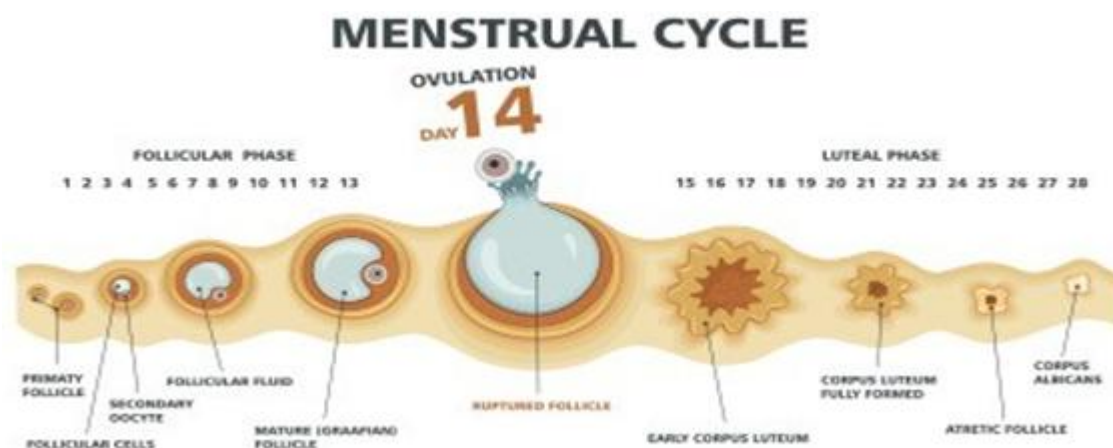
Menstruation is the monthly shedding of the lining of a woman's uterus (more commonly known as the womb). Menstruation is also known by the terms menses, menstrual period, cycle or period. The menstrual blood—which is partly blood and partly tissue from the inside of the uterus—flows from the uterus through the cervix and out of the body through the vagina.

Each month during the years between puberty and menopause, a woman's body goes through a number of changes to get it ready for a possible pregnancy. This series of hormone-driven events is called the menstrual cycle.

During each menstrual cycle, an egg develops and is released from the ovaries. The lining of the uterus builds up. If a pregnancy doesn't happen, the uterine lining sheds during a menstrual period. Then the cycle starts again.

A woman's menstrual cycle is divided into four phases. The length of each phase can differ from woman to woman, and it can change over time:

- Menstrual Phase
- Follicular Phase
- Ovulation Phase
- Luteal Phase



Menstrual phase

The menstrual phase is the first stage of the menstrual cycle. This phase starts when an egg from the previous cycle isn't fertilized. Because pregnancy hasn't taken place, levels of the hormones estrogen and progesterone drop. The thickened lining of uterus, which would support a

pregnancy, is no longer needed, so it sheds through vagina. During period, release a combination of blood, mucus, and tissue from your uterus.

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Follicular phase

The follicular phase starts on the first day of period (so there is some overlap with the menstrual phase) and ends when you ovulate. It starts when the hypothalamus sends a signal to pituitary gland to release follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH). This hormone stimulates the ovaries to produce around 5 to 20 small sacs called follicles. Each follicle contains an immature egg. Only the healthiest egg will eventually mature. (On rare occasions, a woman may have two eggs mature.) The rest of the follicles will be reabsorbed into the body. The maturing follicle sets off a surge in estrogen that thickens the lining of the uterus. This creates a nutrient-rich environment for an embryo to grow.

Ovulation phase

Rising estrogen levels during the follicular phase trigger the pituitary gland to release luteinizing hormone (LH). This is what starts the process of ovulation. Ovulation is when the ovary releases a mature egg. The egg travels down the fallopian tube toward the uterus to be fertilized by sperm. The ovulation phase is the only time during the menstrual cycle when girl can get pregnant. Ovulation happens at around day 14 if you have a 28-day cycle — right in the middle of the menstrual cycle. It lasts about 24 hours. After a day, the egg will die or dissolve if it isn't fertilized.

Luteal phase

After the follicle releases its egg, it changes into the corpus luteum. This structure releases hormones, mainly progesterone and some estrogen. The rise in hormones keeps the uterine lining thick and ready for a fertilized egg to

implant. If girl do get pregnant, the body will produce human chorionic gonadotropin (HCG). This is the hormone pregnancy tests detect. It helps maintain the corpus luteum and keeps the uterine lining thick. If you don't get pregnant, the corpus luteum will shrink away and be resorbed. This leads to decreased levels of estrogen and progesterone, which causes the onset of the period. The uterine lining will shed during the period.

Signs and symptoms of menstruation

Somewhere between five days and two weeks before your period starts, you may experience symptoms that let you know it's coming. These symptoms are known as premenstrual syndrome (PMS). More than 90 percent of people experience PMS to some degree. For most, PMS symptoms are mild, but others have symptoms severe enough to disrupt daily activities. If you have PMS symptoms that interfere with your ability to work, go to school, or enjoy your day, talk to your doctor. PMS usually dissipates within a few days of menstruation. Here are the 10 most common signs that let you know your period is about to start.

Some women get symptoms leading up to and during menstruation, for example, cramps or pains low in the abdomen, bloating or swelling in the abdomen, constipation before period, diarrhea when period starts, Fatigue, Bloating, Headache, Mood swings, Lower back pain, Trouble sleeping.

**Menstruation Hygiene**

"Women and adolescent girls are using clean menstrual management materials to absorb or collect blood that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of the menstruation period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials".

May 28 is Menstrual Hygiene Day (MH Day); a day dedicated to bringing awareness around the vital role that good menstrual hygiene management (MHM) plays in empowering women and adolescent girls worldwide to become all that they can be. The vision behind MH Day is a world in which every woman and girl is able to manage her menstruation in a hygienic way- in safety, privacy, and with dignity- wherever they are.



Methods of Menstruation Hygiene

- 1) **Change sanitary napkin every 4-6 hours-**
Changing sanitary napkins or tampons within every 4-6 hours is the cardinal rule to establish vaginal hygiene. Menstrual blood, when released from the body attracts various organisms from our bodies, which multiply in the warmth of the blood, and cause irritation, rashes or urinary tract infections. Changing your sanitary napkin or tampon regularly curbs the growth of these organisms and prevents infections.
- 2) **Wash yourself properly-**
Washing your vagina regularly is extremely important, because the organisms cling to your body after you have removed your sanitary napkin. Most people wash themselves regularly, but not the right way--which is, using your hands in motion from the vagina to the anus, not vice-versa. Motioning your hand from the anus to the vagina can lead to the transmission of the bacteria from the anus into the vagina or urethra opening leading to infections.
- 3) **Don't use soaps or vagina hygiene products-**
While using vaginal hygiene products everyday is a good idea, using these products during menses can turn things around. Vaginas have their own cleaning mechanism which comes into play during menstrual cycles, and these artificial hygiene products can hamper the natural process leading to infections and growth of bacteria.
- 4) **Discard the sanitary napkin properly-**
Disposing off your tampons and sanitary napkins properly is an important step. Wrap them properly before you throw them away, so the bacteria and infections do not spread. Make sure you don't flush them, since that will block the toilet causing the water to back up, spreading the bacteria all over it. Washing your hands properly is of utmost importance after you have wrapped and discarded the used tampons and sanitary napkins, since you're likely to touch the stained area while wrapping them.
- 5) **Stick to one method of sanitation-**
Women tend to use tampons and sanitary napkins, or two sanitary napkins simultaneously during heavy flow which is an efficient technique. While it may keep you dry and prevent stained clothes, it can cause infections too. The combination of two techniques absorbs the blood making us oblivious to the need to change our

tampons and sanitary napkins. Without frequent change, the accumulated blood invites bacteria and causes infections. So, it is advisable to use one sanitary napkin and change it as frequently as you can during heavy flow. These cardinal rules will help you stay healthy and manage your period better.

Disadvantages of Menstruation Hygiene

Adolescent girls often lack knowledge regarding reproductive health including menstruation hygiene. Poor menstrual hygiene can be a precursor reproductive tract infections and even cancer cervix.

Insufficient, incorrect information regarding menstruation is often a cause of unnecessary restrictions in the daily normal activities of the menstruating girls creating various psychological issues. Besides, the lack of knowledge and awareness also lead to some poor personal hygienic practices during menstruation leading to many reproductive tract infections. Poor menstrual hygiene causes great impact in increased vulnerability to reproductive tract infections (RTI). Currently millions of women sufferers from RTI and infection is transmitted to the offspring. Women having knowledge regarding menstrual hygiene are less vulnerable to RTI and its consequences. Therefore, increased knowledge about menstruation from adolescent period help in decreased suffering of millions of women. Various studies indicate that a huge information gap exists among rural and urban adolescent girls regarding menstrual hygiene.

Some Disadvantages are:-

Urogenital infections

Poor menstrual hygiene is intricately linked with several risk infections. Irise International, an organization that works towards providing with sustainable solutions to girls who face problems in their schools during menstruation, quotes a study in India that says that women who use something other a disposable pad are more likely to suffer from urogenital infections or non-sexually transmitted infections.

Yeast infection

Washing hands after changing sanitary napkins is always advisable and is a healthy habit. However, those who do not do so, might run the risk of suffering from a yeast infection or even Hepatitis B.

Fungal infections

Using unclean sanitary napkins can lead to several health hazards one of them being fungal infections.

Urinary tract infection

The article Menstrual Hygiene Practices, WASH Access and the Risk of Urogenital Infection in Women from Odisha, India cites that urinary tract infection is one of the most prevalent forms of infection in girls and women of menstruating age caused mainly due to unhygienic menstrual practices.

Cervical cancer

Unhealthy menstrual practices are linked to cervical cancer. The article Relations between poor menstrual practices and cervical cancer mentions the same.

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