

Menstrual Hygiene

Menstruation is a pivotal event in any girl's life, marking the beginning of her reproductive life. Apart from all the mental repercussions associated with this rite of passage imposed by nature that manifest with time, immediately more important is the hygiene associated with it. Maintaining hygiene during period days is vital and crucial for every female. Now, in our modern twentieth century, people are more open minded and discuss issues like menstruation, which were considered taboo previously. But even today, many girls and women still lack the basic ideas and knowledge of menstruation and how to maintain hygiene during their period days. These are the fundamental knowledge that every female should know about their cycle to ensure a healthy reproductive life.

Some very basic steps to maintain hygiene during menstruation include:

Change napkins regularly- Menstrual blood – once it has left the body – gets contaminated with the body's innate organisms. This rule applies for even those days when you don't have much bleeding, since your pad is still damp and will have organisms from your vagina, sweat from your genitals, etc. When these organisms remain in a warm and moist place for a long time, they tend to multiply and can lead to conditions like urinary tract infection, vaginal infections and skin rashes. The standard time to change sanitary pads is every four hours.

This may vary from woman to woman. Those having heavier flows will need to change more frequently than others.

Wash yourself regularly- When you menstruate, the blood tends to enter tiny spaces like the skin between your labia or crust around the opening of the vagina and you should always wash this excess blood away. This practice also tends to beat the bad odour that could emit otherwise. So, it is important to wash your vagina well before you change into a new pad. If you cannot wash yourself before you change, make sure to wipe off the areas using a toilet paper or tissue.

Beware of a pad rash- A pad rash is something that you might experience during a period of heavy flow. It usually occurs when the pad has been wet for a long time and rubs along the thighs causing it to chaff. To prevent this from occurring, try to stay dry during your periods. If you do have a rash, change your pads regularly and stay dry. Apply an antiseptic ointment, after a bath and before bed – this will heal the rash and prevent further chaffing. If it gets worse, do visit your doctor who will be able to prescribe you a medicated powder that can keep the area dry.

Never use two pads simultaneously- Some women who experience heavy flow, tend to use two sanitary pads at one go to control the flow and prevent staining of clothes.

This, however, is a bad idea as it can cause infections in the vaginal region. Stick to one and keep changing it often if the flow is more.

Wear comfortable and clean underwear- While changing your sanitary pad is essential, it is also important to wear something comfortable during these days. Tight thongs or underwear made of fabric that doesn't allow your skin to breathe will also lead to infections. Stick to clean and comfortable cotton knickers that do not stick to your skin.

Another problem faced by women is irregular periods. While menstruation usually gets regular with age, there are certain food items one can take to increase regularity.

Turmeric- It is helpful in regulating menstruation and balancing hormones. The antispasmodic and anti-inflammatory properties relieve menstrual pain. Consume one-quarter teaspoon of turmeric with milk, honey or jaggery. Take it daily for several weeks or until you see improvement.

Ginger- Boil 1 tablespoon of fresh ginger for 5 minutes. Add a little sugar and drink the mixture three times a day after your meals. Ginger is highly recommended for regulating menstrual cycles and getting rid of irregular periods.

Cumin- Soaked cumin can be used in the treatment of irregular periods. Take 2 teaspoons of cumin seeds and soak in water over night and drink it in the morning. You

need to drink this water every day to get your periods regularised.

Recently, vaginal washes are hitting the markets. Different brands offer different benefits, and are encouraging women of all ages to use these washes. But experts believe that these washes are just a new global business policy acquired by companies to deceive women into helping them earn easy money. Gynecologists say that there is absolutely no need to wash the vagina with any special washes; it is a self-cleaning device with regular cell turnover and a highly-tuned pH and micro biome. Altering any of these factors can lead to irritation and even infection. Too much use of these washes may cause complications in pregnancy and may also lead to ectopic pregnancies.

Menstrual Hygiene Day is an annual awareness day on 28 May to highlight the importance of good menstrual hygiene management (MHM). It was initiated by the German-based NGO WASH United in 2014 and aims to benefit women and girls worldwide. The 28th was selected to acknowledge that 28 days is the average length of the menstrual cycle.

By Faiza Khondokar

PERSPECTIVE

Female attendants at lingerie stores

For many, the process of shopping for lingerie at New Market or Gawsia and having to interact with male shop attendants is something they'd like to avoid as much as possible. The whole situation can easily get really awkward for some.

There are many obvious reasons why this awkwardness may arise. First and foremost, the attitude of the attendants plays a huge role in the situation. In many stores, the male shopkeepers act out in a way and say certain things that aren't appropriate. Samira usually goes shopping with her mother when she needs new undergarments. On one occasion, when her mother wasn't with her, she had to face an extremely unpleasant situation. From the moment she stepped into the small shop, the men were giving her weird smiles, and then she also caught them staring at her chest and heard one of them making comments about her. Out of sheer embarrassment, she walked out of the store, hearing them laugh as she left. That incident left her scarred, and now she chooses to shop at stores with female shopkeepers. Samira's experience is just one of many thousands.

Women have to face this time and time again whenever they walk into a lingerie store with male attendants.

Unfortunately, regardless of how modern we become, certain aspects about us will not change. Our conservative opinion regarding undergarments is one of them. And having men sell said undergarments is still quite unthinkable. Even in a completely normal situation, they might feel embarrassed and awkward. Looking through the available items gets very difficult when they are unable to move past their conservations. In cases like these, many male shopkeepers also intentionally make it harder for those women.

However, there are also many women who take it in a stride and remain unaffected by male attendants at these shops. The attitude of the customer in many cases determines the behaviour of the shopkeeper; if you feel weird about shopping there from the get-go, chances are things are going to go south real fast. However, if you maintain an indifferent attitude towards the gender of the attendant, chances are your shopping experience will

go without a hitch.

There are many women who have been shopping for lingerie from New Market since they were in their teens, and are less likely of being affected by it. Also, going with an older person, like their mothers or elder sisters, ensures that they do not face any unsavoury incident.

Another saving grace are the stores you frequent with known male shopkeepers, who, over the years, form a loyalty of sorts with the customer. These shopkeepers, in the fear of turning away regulars, would never create any kind of uncomfortable situations whatsoever.

Employing female attendants in such stores would be an easy solution to the whole problem. Stores like Lifestyle and Sweet Dreams already have female shop assistants, for which people find it easier to shop there. They are more comfortable in expressing what they like, and can figure out what would suit them best. However, there is a huge price differential in these stores, which might be out of budget for some.

If the price hike issue is negated, employing female attendants will not only make

the situation more bearable, it will also eliminate the uncomfortable situation that arises when the male shopkeeper gives his input on what would fit and look good on the customer. Employing female attendants will also help the economy a tad bit more, in terms of modernisation.

But until that day arrives, women have to start becoming more comfortable in their skin. It is not possible to control the behaviour of others, but it is possible to control their own. If women are unfazed, or at least act as if they are, then there is a higher chance that they will not be bothered or have comments made about.

The moral of here is that women have to work or shop within a small window of opportunity when it comes to shopping for lingerie. Either they have to grow a thicker skin and face the unruly male shop attendants, or go a bit out of budget and feel comfortable shopping in a female-only environment. Choices are limited until a day comes when more women set up shops in New Market and the likes.

By Qazi Mustabshara Tabir