



# SURE THE NEW WAVE

**COSMO'S  
GUIDE TO  
THE MODERN  
PERIOD**

BY **laura beil & anna maltby**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY **eugenia loli**

### **MENSTRUATION!**

Half the world's been doing it once a month for, oh, 200,000 years, but only now, in 2015, is it something we're *finally* talking about in a semi-shame-free way. Unfortunately, research and treatments are still stuck in the days of 1950s condescension ("cuddle up with a hot water bottle, little lady!"). It's kind of crazy that more than 80 percent of women experience cramps, irritation, and moodiness during their periods, and yet no one seems to care enough to fix it.

We can't create magical new period cures for you (we're not actually doctors or Big Pharma researchers), but we can help you ride the crimson wave with a little more confidence. Because you're way too busy and important to be held back by a little bleeding out of your wherever.



# DOES YOUR PERIOD HAVE TO BE THIS BAD?

BY **laura beil**

## TREATMENT FOR PERIOD PAIN HASN'T ADVANCED IN 30 YEARS. WHAT GIVES?

**↑** he roses were a gift from a grateful patient to Dr. Béla Schick in the summer of 1919. When the flowers arrived, the doctor asked his maid to place them in water. She hesitated but took them at his insistence. The next day, the blooms had wilted. The servant admitted she should not have handled them because she was menstruating, and during those days of the month, her touch could be lethal.

Intrigued, Dr. Schick—a renowned physician in Vienna—began investigating the mysterious killer poison. In 1920, he published the results of an experiment in which he asked women to hold blossoms at different times of the month. “The skin of menstruating women did in fact excrete substances that hasten the death

of flowers,” he reported solemnly. Public and medical lore at the time contended that the touch of a menstruating woman could not only wither plants but could turn wine sour and keep dough from rising.

This imaginary threat was even given a name—menotoxin—and doctors debated its existence as recently as the 1970s. In 1977, a group of researchers writing in *The Lancet* wondered if the elusive menotoxin was in fact related to prostaglandins, hormone-like chemical messengers produced by the body that may be elevated during a woman’s period. They were on to something, but not in the way they thought. Studies throughout the late ’70s and ’80s determined that prostaglandins could trigger uterine contractions and menstrual pain. More significantly, research determined that nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or NSAIDs, blocked prostaglandins and offered relief.

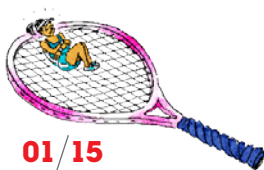
About three-quarters of all women are thought to experience some kind of menstrual pain. Among young women, it is the leading single cause of lost time from school or work. “If you compare women and men in terms of their ability to influence society, how much unrealized potential is lost from women because they have to deal with insufficiently

treated pain?” asks ob-gyn Frank Tu, MD, of NorthShore University HealthSystem in Chicago.

Early treatment could be vital. Recent studies have found potential links between the severity of menstrual cramps in younger life and the risk of developing chronic pain in later years. Severe cramps make cells in the central nervous system more sensitive, says Pamela Stratton, MD, who studies endometriosis, a condition that can lead to painful periods, at the National Institutes of Health. “We’ve found that women with endometriosis are more sensitive to pain and stay more sensitive,” she says.

Yet it’s typical for a woman to go five to eight years without an endometriosis diagnosis, Dr. Stratton says, and by then, treatment may not be as effective. “They accept the pain as part of their periods,” she says. “Women are sometimes told by their doctors that it is all in their head or it is normal.” As many as 30 percent of gynecological patients overall are suffering severe, recurring period pain, according to a study released in August. And when symptoms are treated, the standard advice has changed little in three decades. It is one of the most significant health problems for which there is almost no public discussion and little research.

### 2015 / THE YEAR THE PERIOD WENT PUBLIC



**01/15**

Top tennis player Heather Watson blames Australian Open loss on “girl things,” wins points for honesty.



**03/15**

An artsy photo of a woman with a period stain on her sweatpants is “accidentally” taken down by Instagram...twice. Uproar ensues.



**04/15**

Musician Kiran Gandhi runs the London marathon without a tampon, becomes a free-bleeding, stigma-busting sensation.

**05/15**

Nicolle Wallace, former communications director under W, says on *The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore*, “Yes, I worked in the White House, and yes, every 28 days I bled, but the country went on.”





**shark week!**

NSAIDs—which include OTC drugs like ibuprofen, naproxen, and aspirin as well as prescription meds like Celebrex—were a breakthrough treatment. After that, much of medical science took a victory lap and declared the problem conquered. If you search for research focused on menstrual pain, as Dr. Tu recently did, “it seemed to just get quiet around the mid to late ’80s,” he says. “People were no longer interested.” That means we haven’t had a significant advance since Duran Duran released “Notorious.”

**W**hen Richard Legro, MD, of Penn State College of Medicine applied for a grant to study primary dysmenorrhea—period pain that is not tied to another cause—he reviewed all ongoing projects backed by the National Institutes of Health. “There’s not one that is developing or testing a treatment to improve painful periods,” he says. To be fair, tax money does support research for endometriosis and a related condition, adenomyosis. Great effort goes into basic lab studies about chronic pain—but research published this summer in *Nature Neuroscience* reported that experiments are overwhelmingly conducted on male rodents and that male and female mice may experience pain differently on a biological level.

Without new research into why period pain persists in so many women despite NSAIDs, drug companies hesitate to invest in developing a treatment, says John LaMattina, a former head of research and development at Pfizer. A 2011 report from



**06/15**

Apple *finally* updates your iPhone’s Health app to include period tracking.

**07/15**

Key & Peele offer dudes a hilarious “menstruation orientation,” earn an internal standing ovation from women everywhere.



**07/15**

No taxation with menstruation! Canada ends its tax on sanitary products, calling it discriminatory to gals and transgender guys. Aussies and Brits protest “tampon taxes” too.

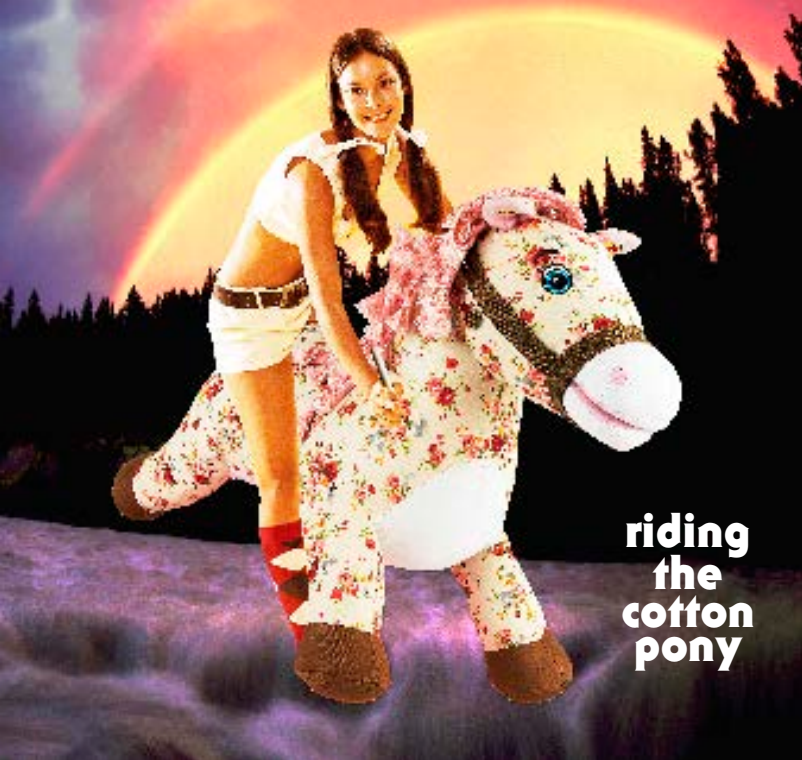


**08/15**

Donald Trump suggests GOP debate moderator Megyn Kelly had “blood coming out of her wherever.” Twitter and Carly Fiorina respond that #Periods AreNotAnInsult.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY **joana avillez**



riding  
the  
cotton  
pony

# Stop the Pain

If you're suffering, you don't have to put up with it. There are options. Of course, check with your doctor.

## TRY THESE FIRST

### NSAIDs

Pop ibuprofen, aspirin, or naproxen with food every 6 to 8 hours starting 2 days before your flow, says Juliet Nevins, MD, an ob-gyn in Brooklyn. Four pills (800 mgs) of ibuprofen every 8 hours for the first two to three days is safe unless you have gastric issues.

### Exercise

Both cardio and stretching mitigate period pain, says a 2014 study. Working out releases mood-enhancing beta-endorphins and boosts circulation.

### Self-Massage

A 15-minute aromatherapy rubdown may reduce cramps, perhaps due to more blood flow. Lie faceup with a pillow under knees. Pour 2 milliliters of lavender oil on belly; rub gently in circular motions around the navel and upper pelvis.

## WEIRD, BUT MIGHT WORK

### Kinesio Taping

You know that flexible, colorful tape athletes are often sporting? A study in the *Journal of Physical Therapy Science* found it helps with period pain. Place a short strip between your belly button and the top of the pubic-hair area, a longer strip horizontally between the hip bones.

### Ginger

According to a study published in the *Archives of Gynecology and Obstetrics* in June 2015, this root is as effective as an NSAID in relieving period pain. Take a 250 mg supplement every 6 hours.

### Vitamin Injections

A doctor's injection of vitamin K1 into an acupuncture point just above the inner ankle improved menstrual pain for an hour, according to a small study of 14 women last year in *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*.

## WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS...

### Narcotics

Some women's pain during menses is so severe, doctors suggest serious painkillers like hydrocodone. "Try everything else first," Dr. Nevins says. "Narcotics use can quickly lead to dependency, especially if you rely on them every month."

### Surgery

Sometimes period pain is the result of problems like fibroids or endometriosis. This kind of pain tends to start earlier and last longer than regular cramps, and sufferers don't often have the nausea or diarrhea that can accompany them. Your doc may suggest fibroid removal, a laparoscopic procedure for endometriosis, or in very serious cases, hysterectomy. —Anna Maltby

PhRMA, a pharmaceutical industry group, lists 851 products in development for conditions that tend to affect women. Only three address endometriosis, and none specifically targets cramps.

It might seem like a sexist conspiracy, but there are lots of reasons scientists don't get that excited about menstruation. In the research world, Fatal Scary Problems attract grant money and launch careers. No one ever died from cramps. "You're not going to get big dollars or prestige for researching menstrual pain," says Jennifer Bump, MD, of Baylor College of Medicine, in Houston.

Further hampering progress, there's no public outcry. Men—and women with easier periods—may find it hard to empathize. Menstruation remains a culturally awkward topic, driven into the shadows. "Throughout history, women were shunned or locked away in their little hut when they were on their period," Dr. Bump says. "There is this idea that this is a curse, and it somehow is shameful." PMS is a subject fraught with stereotype and ridicule—witness Donald Trump versus Megyn Kelly. Women themselves can struggle with frank conversations about menstrual pain. Says Dr. Bump, "I still have patients who, for lots of different reasons, don't want to talk about it."

**k**athryn Jones, a 33-year-old occupational therapist who lives near Boston, had excruciating periods starting in her teens. On the first day of her cycle, she could do little more than curl up. "I would not even be able to answer my phone," she says. "I found myself holding my breath because the pain came in such waves."

She sought one doctor after another. "The only thing they would say was, 'Oh if you have bad cramps, go on birth control.'" She tried the Pill but didn't like the side effects. After that, she says, "they just said deal with it—get a heating pad, stay hydrated. I stopped bringing it up after a while. I wasn't going to ask the same question a million times."

Soon she stopped talking about it altogether. "You're not going to say, 'I don't feel good today because I'm on my period.' I mean, people blush, they look away. Unless you're a woman with this same experience, no one wants to hear about it."

Stephenie Combs, 28, of Houston, lived with similar frustrations. The cramps in her early teens were tolerable, she says, but "once I hit 25, something really happened to my hormones. I felt like my own body hated me." She would soak in hot baths, then sit on the couch clutching a glass of

wine. She tried two doctors, both of whom told her pain was normal. “They’re like, ‘Doesn’t every woman cramp?’ I was popping naproxen like candy and thinking, this can’t be good for me.”

A lot of women do get better with NSAIDs. A review published this summer by the Cochrane research group found that women taking 20 varieties of NSAIDs were about twice as likely overall to get relief compared with women who took a placebo. But according to the Food and Drug Administration, NSAIDs can cause stomachaches, diarrhea, an increased risk of heart attack, and over the long haul, kidney problems. And for as many as half of women with severe pain, the Cochrane report noted, NSAIDs don’t do any good at all.

That doesn’t mean you’re stuck though. Lyubov Fetsetsnets, a 27-year-old school nurse who lives outside Chicago, had cramps

that would radiate down into her upper thighs. She had trouble even walking and often called in sick. “I went to a really prestigious doctor, and he told me to just take a few ibuprofen before it starts,” she says. It didn’t work.

She ended up in the office of Dr. Tu at NorthShore after she was told he was an expert in gynecologic pain. He spent almost two hours discussing her issues. He eventually advised her to take a prescription muscle relaxant the first few days of her period—a use that hasn’t been studied or FDA-approved but has had a lot of anecdotal success, he says.

The pain isn’t gone, but it doesn’t disrupt her life as much. And she was glad she didn’t give up seeking help. “Keep looking for a doctor,” she says, “until you find someone who will actually take time to listen to you.”

## MODERN PERIOD ESSENTIALS

**Bloody good ideas to make your week a little less brutal.**

### Sanitary Subscriptions

**Le Parcel** and **Hello Flo** (both \$15 per month) will mail you tampons, pads, liners...and chocolate.

### Stealth Packaging

Delivery service **Lola** (from \$10 per month, mylola.com) sends tampons in a box so discreet, you can leave it out on your bathroom counter.

### Tracking Apps

Avoid an ambush from Aunt Flo with **Clue**, **Ruby by Glow**, and **Period Tracker Lite** (all free, Android and iOS). Monitor flow, sex drive, and PMS too.

### Un-Granny Panties

Sexy **ThinX** (from \$24, shethinx.com), breathable **Dear Kate** (from \$32, dearkates.com), and sporty **Knixwear** (from \$20, knixwear.com), are all absorbent and reusable—great for light days or spotting backup.

### Stain Busters

An enzyme-based remover like **Carbona Stain Devils #4** (\$3.99, carbona.com) is tops.

—A.M.

Kathryn Jones found her solution through unconventional means: a girls’ getaway trip to a massage therapist who noticed that her lower vertebra were fused. This caused her to favor one side while she walked, throwing the muscles in her hips out of balance. One side was almost locked in a constant spasm, which got worse during her period. A physical therapist helped her learn how to relax the tightened muscles in her pelvis, hips, and glutes as well as rebalance them through strengthening exercises, which significantly decreased her period pain. “I still feel uncomfortable, but I’m not curled up in a ball,” she says.

Stephenie Combs got relief by changing her birth control to a progestin-emitting IUD, which lightened her periods without dramatically adding extra hormones in the rest of her body. “It changed everything tremendously,” Combs says. Dr. Bump feels the hormonal IUD is an underused game-changer for a lot of women. It won’t help everyone though. Rarely, cramps can get worse on a hormonal IUD, although the effect tends to wane after a few months.

**N**othing will truly cure menstrual pain until we understand where it comes from. Cramps don’t begin and end just with prostaglandins. They cause the uterus to contract, and those contractions help the inner lining to shed. But this same process occurs in everyone who menstruates. “So why does one woman experience it as painful and another doesn’t? We just don’t know,” says Laura Payne, PhD, of the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. “It’s not just the contractions. There’s some interaction happening there, and we don’t totally know what it is.”

To move forward, the cultural aversion to honest and serious discussion must end, Payne says. “There have been these taboos about talking about menstruation and really bringing it to the forefront as an issue that women deal with,” she says. “It’s not the type of thing people think of as a real problem.”



# KNOW YOUR FLOW



## PCOS

With polycystic ovarian syndrome, your cycle may be super-short and light or extra-long and heavy. You might also have weight gain or obesity, excess body hair, and acne. It's serious, raising the risk for infertility and diabetes, so see a doc.



## Hormonal IUDs

Mirena, Liletta, and Skyla release levonorgestrel, which reduces the thickening of the uterine lining. Because the IUD is next to the uterus, hormones don't have to travel in the body, making them very effective, says Meredith Loveless, MD, an American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists spokesperson. Your period might go away completely.



## Fasting

Muslim women who fasted during Ramadan experienced a variety of menstrual problems, including abnormally light periods, very short cycles, and abnormally long or heavy periods, according to a 2013 study in the *Iranian Journal of Reproductive Medicine*.



## The Pill, Patch, and Ring

These methods prevent ovulation; that mechanism also reduces the amount of lining that builds up in the uterus, so you have less to shed.



## NSAIDs

This class of meds can reduce flow for the same reason they help with cramps—because they can lower your levels of prostaglandins.



## Progesterone Therapy

The same kind of hormone that IUDs use to give you a more pleasant period can be taken orally to lighten the flow.

lighter



## Disordered Sleep

Pulling all-nighters every single night? Skimping on sleep throws your hormones out of whack, causing a domino effect throughout your body—including, potentially, a disappearing period.



## Extreme Exercise

Intense physical strain may cause the pituitary gland to slow or stop production of reproductive hormones in order to conserve energy for essential functions. Fitness fiends, beware of rapid weight loss and eat plenty of calories, protein, and healthy fat.



## Regular Exercise

Docs aren't sure why, admits Dr. Loveless, but a good exercise routine seems to make periods a bit lighter. Aim for at least 20 minutes of brisk walking a day.



## Prescriptions

If you're regularly bleeding through your pad or tampon in less than two hours, your doc might prescribe tranexamic acid (aka Lysteda), a drug that reduces heavy bleeding. It's used to treat hemophilia.



## Being Underweight

Blame the combination of extreme strain on the body systems plus low body fat, which equals unbalanced reproductive hormones.

M.I.A.

Whether you get a drip or a deluge is kind of random. Two things really matter: if your personal normal changes and if your frequency is funky (more than once a month or less than once every three months). If this sounds like you, the info you need to get back on track might be in here.

## wild cards



### Stress

Chronic everyday stress—as in, an abusive relationship or being someone's caretaker—may make your period weirdly irregular or light (maybe because an anxiety-ridden body isn't an optimal place to host a fetus) one month, then doubly heavy the next time you menstruate.



### Funky Schedules

Among flight attendants surveyed in one 2013 study, about 15 percent suffered heavy periods. Researchers believe this could be linked to sleep disturbances and jet lag.



### Excess Weight

More fatty tissue means more estrogen, which can thicken uterine lining and cause skips in ovulation. When your period does come, it's crazy-heavy.



### Working With Chemicals

In a recent Iranian study of employees at a pharmaceutical company, those who were regularly exposed to certain organic solvents had heavier periods. Older studies on farm workers found that those exposed to pesticides also had menstrual trouble, possibly because some chemicals can mimic estrogen.



### Adenomyosis

Aka endometriosis of the uterus. It's endometrial tissue that grows into the lining of the uterus, causing painful and heavy periods. Don't just suck it up—talk to a gyno.



### Smoking

...especially if you started as a teen, per a 2014 study published in *Tobacco Control*. Add to the list of reasons to visit [QuitNet.com](http://QuitNet.com).



### Soy

Eating food that contains phytoestrogens can theoretically elevate your estrogen levels and bring trouble. Still, you'd likely have to eat a ton of soy to see an effect, says Dr. Loveless.



### STIs

Chlamydia, gonorrhea, and pelvic inflammatory disease can interfere with the uterus's ability to contract, making bleeding worse. Your gyno can test you.



### Uterine Fibroids or Polyps

Some can alter the lining or shape of the uterus. In addition to a lotta flow, look out for irregular bleeding, pelvic pain, frequent urination, and backaches.



### The Copper IUD

"The uterus has to get used to the copper in Paragard—it causes some inflammation, so you build up more blood and cramp more," says Laura MacIsaac, MD, associate professor of obstetrics, gynecology, and reproductive science at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. "For most women, by the third menses, their period goes back to the way it was."



### Bleeding Disorders

Super-heavy periods are a mark of von Willebrand disease, an underdiagnosed genetic disorder. Watch for other signs like nosebleeds and bruising. —A.M.

## heavier

## Flow-Chart Key



WORK



LIFESTYLE



HEALTH ISSUE



MEDS





### Gut Trouble

The same hormones that cause your uterus to contract cause the organs along the digestive tract to contract too. Results: gross symptoms like bloating, constipation, diarrhea, and nausea.

**WHAT TO DO:** If your stomach tolerates them, take ibuprofen or naproxen. Hormonal birth control may also help a lot. Pills with a low dose of estrogen are good for sensitive stomachs, says ob-gyn Meredith Loveless, MD. And cut down on salty junk food—you may be craving it, but it can make bloating worse.



**IT WORKED FOR ME!**  
"Raspberry tea."  
—SHANICE N., 27

### Cravings

Pre-period, the stress hormone cortisol spikes and the calm-inducing hormone serotonin dips—a one-two punch that leaves you wanting sugary, carby, fatty, and salty comfort food, says Willow Jarosh, RD, of C&J Nutrition.

**WHAT TO DO:** Meet cravings halfway. Instead of fries, have baked sweet potato wedges (the vitamin C is good for skin, and potassium curbs water retention). If you want Chinese, pair lean protein with broccoli and brown rice (fiber keeps you regular) sans sauce (sodium makes you bloat more).

**IT WORKED FOR ME!**  
"I head to yoga to relish in the pose modifications offered to women on their 'monthly holiday,' as my instructor calls it. (I also go to hear him say that.)"  
—BECKY T., 29

# YOU'VE GOT ISSUES.

CRAMPS ARE NOT THE ONLY PAIN-IN-OR-NEAR-THE-ASS THAT CROPS UP DURING SHARK WEEK. HERE'S HOW TO FEEL BETTER.

**IT WORKED FOR ME!**  
"Chipotle."  
—ADRIANA A., 23

### Mood Swings

When your flow starts, there's a drop in estrogen, which plays a big role in mood regulation, hence your transformation into a lady-Hulk... or someone who just watched *The Notebook*.

**WHAT TO DO:** Hormonal BC can be a winner here, or it could cause crankiness—if one method or brand fails you, try another. Snack on produce and protein to avoid blood sugar fluctuations that exacerbate moodiness.



**IT WORKED FOR ME!**  
"I take a bath with Epsom salts and drink cucumber water like it's my job."  
—ALANA W., 29

### Acne

High progesterone levels before your period rev up oil-gland production. Then testosterone (a source of skin trouble) stays steady as the hormones that usually balance out T drop. You're left defenseless and zitty, says dermatologist Monica Schadlow, MD.

**WHAT TO DO:** Use a gentle cleanser, like Cetaphil or Cerave, and don't go nuts with the harsh scrubs, toners, or wipes—you want to get rid of bad oils but keep good ones. BC pills with drospirenone (Yasmin, Yaz) are FDA-approved to treat moderate acne. Prescription topical meds can also help.





**IT WORKED FOR ME!**  
 "Orgasming usually helps, so I try to have some me-time."  
 —SOPHIE B., 31

**Headaches and Migraines**

The drop in estrogen may affect the activity of key neurotransmitters, says osteopath Lee Peterlin, director of headache research at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Thus, your head feels like crap.

**WHAT TO DO:** Start popping NSAIDs two days before your period headache usually hits. Magnesium oxide, an OTC supplement, may help prevent migraines, says Peterlin. If your pain is no joke, ask your doc about Rx options such as triptans.



**Fatigue**

It's super common, laments Dr. Ashton. She speculates that women may feel wiped out by a decline in hormone levels just before a period starts.

**WHAT TO DO:** Give in to that sleepiness at night, aiming for 7 to 8 hours. When you wake up, even though you might be dragging, do about 30 minutes of moderate cardio (walking works). It will give you an energy boost—plus some bonus endorphins—afterward.

**IT WORKED FOR ME!**  
 "I double over and just yell like a wild banshee. It's like some primitive form of release and startles my boyfriend...but, you know, pain."  
 —KASIA G., 30

**WE'VE GOT FIXES**

**Weight Gain**

If you're gaining weight a few days before your flow starts, it's probably water retention. The likely culprit: yep, hormones.

**WHAT TO DO:** Caffeinated drinks can be a natural diuretic, says Cosmo contributor Jennifer Ashton, MD, an ob-gyn in Englewood, New Jersey. And hit a cycling or hot-yoga class—not only will you sweat away some water weight, but exercise helps with PMS in general.

**IT WORKED FOR ME!**  
 "I recently put Young Living's PanAway essential oil in a diffuser the night before and I. Did. Not. Have. Any. Cramps!"  
 —ANDREA V., 28



**IT WORKED FOR ME!**  
 "A fizzy drink, like ginger ale, always helps...or a strong margarita."  
 —MORGAN B., 23



**Lower-Back Pain**

This may actually be cramps in disguise: Since some uterus tilt toward the back, that could be where you're feeling it.

**WHAT TO DO:** Go old-school: Heating pads really can help, whether your front or back is hurting. Thermacare makes portable ones for under your clothes (from \$3, amazon.com). An NIH study also showed that weekly sessions of yoga or stretching helped lessen back pain (although it wasn't directly linked to your red-dot special). —A.M.

PROF STYLIST: LAUREN SHIELDS FOR HALLEY RESOURCES

PHOTOGRAPHED BY levi brown

# THERE WILL BE BLOOD

( so let's deal with it )

Got tampon Q's? We're your source for tampon A's. And pad A's. And cup A's. And A's for pretty much everything else you're wondering about down there.

## Should I be worried about Toxic Shock Syndrome?

Not really. Here's the deal: TSS is a potentially fatal illness caused by bacteria, not tampons. They can facilitate it in part because a blood-soaked tampon is a good place for bacteria to grow, says Meredith Loveless, MD. Model Lauren Wasser made headlines this summer when she shared her TSS story, which ended with a leg amputation. That's terrible, but the odds of TSS happening to you are super rare: between 1 and 17 cases for every 100,000 menstruating people annually. To reduce your risk for any infection: Wash your hands before inserting a tampon, don't wear one for more than eight hours, and pick the smallest needed for your flow. Using a super-absorbency tampon if you don't need it could lead to micro-tears in the vaginal wall, which could let germs in.

## What if I leave a tampon in way too long?

If it's been in there for more than a day or two, see your ob-gyn. "We've taken some crazy things out of vaginas before. It won't shock us at all!" says Jennifer Ashton, MD. Your gyno will most likely do a culture to check for infections and may place you on antibiotics as a precaution.

## Can I shower with my tampon in?

Yep, but it will likely get wet and then expand, so you may have to change it sooner.

## I get yeast infections after my period a lot. Could wearing pads be why?

Contact with a wet pad can irritate skin, making it more susceptible to yeast that's present. But it might also stem from changes in vaginal pH, says Dr. Ashton. "Try eating probiotics—there's growing data that this can help."

## WE NEED YOU

## Tampons for All!

Most states don't tax essential items, like groceries and prescriptions, yet all but 10 states do tax sanitary products. Um...we'd call those essentials! Visit [Change.org](http://Change.org) to sign our No Tax On Tampons petition. Worse, many low-income and homeless women often don't have access to tampons and pads at all. Food banks and shelters distribute them, but they're often in short supply. Our campaign at [Cosmopolitan.com/TamponsForAll](http://Cosmopolitan.com/TamponsForAll) lets you donate \$7 (the cost of a box) to [Distributing Dignity](http://DistributingDignity.org), a charity that provides these products to shelters across the country.

## Should I be using all-natural sanitary products?


Your call. In theory, fewer chemicals might be better for your body. But it's not proven that chemicals in tampons and pads leach into your system...or that organic is better. If you tend to get itchy or irritated, you may be a good candidate, says Dr. Ashton. And *everyone* should opt for unscented—fragrances can be harsh on your delicate vag.

## So...the menstrual cup. How does that work?

The cup—a bell-shaped, flexible vessel that collects blood right in your va-jay-jay—has been around since the 1930s, but it's getting more popular. You fold up the rubbery cup to insert it, and it returns to its shape inside you. After about 10 hours, you dump it out, clean it with warm water and mild soap, and put it back inside. Downside: It can leak if it overfills or slips out of place. Still, says Dr. Loveless, "a lot of women love it once they get the hang of it."

## I'm a transgender man and shopping for "feminine products" is alienating. Tips?

Thankfully, almost anything can be ordered online. The feelings of disorientation some trans men feel during periods are harder to solve. "Deciding what to use can be challenging, especially if he's already transitioned socially—it's difficult to wear boxers and use a liner or pad," says Henry Ng, MD, president of GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBT Equality. "Some may use tampons, but for others that may give them dysphoria." Talking to a gender-affirming doctor about options, including injections or surgery that eliminate periods, can help. Find one at [GLMA.org](http://GLMA.org). —A.M.



Now this is what we call a diva cup.

# men on periods

Sure, there are more fun topics to discuss with your guy (dream travel spots, Fallon vs. Colbert), but chatting about menses can make for a better TOTM, every month. "Talk early and it won't cause ongoing anxiety," says Cosmo guy-advice guru Logan Hill. Tell him if you're regular ("so he can support you if you're late," says Hill), what you want in bed ("massage week?" he suggests), and your symptoms ("a reminder that women are different"). We asked a group of very game guys what they think about...

## ...Periods

"Sucks to be a girl. I mean, er, it's hard to be a girl."

—Orlando M., 23

"I don't want to hear about it. La la la la."

—Ben P., 22

"No one's pregnant! It's like a little milestone every month."

—Sam W., 23

"It's when the uterine lining is shed each month. I Googled it! I was like, I have to know what this is. It's hard to understand what your girlfriend is going through, because there is no equivalent for men."

—James J., 26

## ...Period Sex

"It can be disconcerting when you see the blood. It's like, okay, wow, your sexual organs are not just a place my penis can hang out."

—Omari G., 31

"Shower sex! I don't care. In high school, my girlfriend wasn't on birth control so we did it at the end of her period so she wouldn't get pregnant."

—Joey S., 23

**\* You can conceive while menstruating. Contraception, please!**

"It's not a turn-off, but it's not a turn-on. And it isn't happening on my sheets." —Will B., 21

"It's something you should do only if you really know someone. It's a personal time."

—Paul S., 22

"If you have sex all the time and there's a few days when you're not, it's not that big of a deal. You can watch a new show on Netflix! But if we're going on vacation, I'm like, 'please don't be on your period!'"

—Sam W.

**\* If you're on the Pill, it's safe to skip your placebo week if you want to avoid a period.**

## ...Buying Tampons for You

"What's the problem? [Cashiers] know it's not for you! They're probably thinking, 'That guy has a girlfriend he loves.'"

—Ben P.

"I buy the condoms, you buy the tampons."

—Orlando M.

"If I was, like, married, I would do it."

—Sam W.

"It's overwhelming—there are like 20 kinds!" —Paul S.

## ...Menstrual Cups

"It's reusable?! No, no, no, no, no." —Ben P.

## ...PMS

"The first word that comes to mind is *bitch*. No joke. That time of the month brings serious fights."

—Will B.

"Some guys think, she's mad, but I'm not wrong, she's on her period. It shouldn't be that way—you probably did mess up. It's not an excuse to do whatever you want."

—James J.

"If I'm dating someone who's using that as an excuse [to get mad], that's not the relationship for me."

—Sam W.

"It's life, it happens. If she snaps because I left my dish in the sink and I know she's on her period, I cut her slack."

—Paul S.

"I try to understand why she's in a mood. If it's a small fight, why are we having it? Is it because she's on her period? Am I drawing an unfair inference?"

—Omari G.

"I like to know [if she's menstruating] so I can get the chocolate out." —Orlando M.

**\* NOTE FROM YOUR EDITORS**

paging  
edward  
cullen