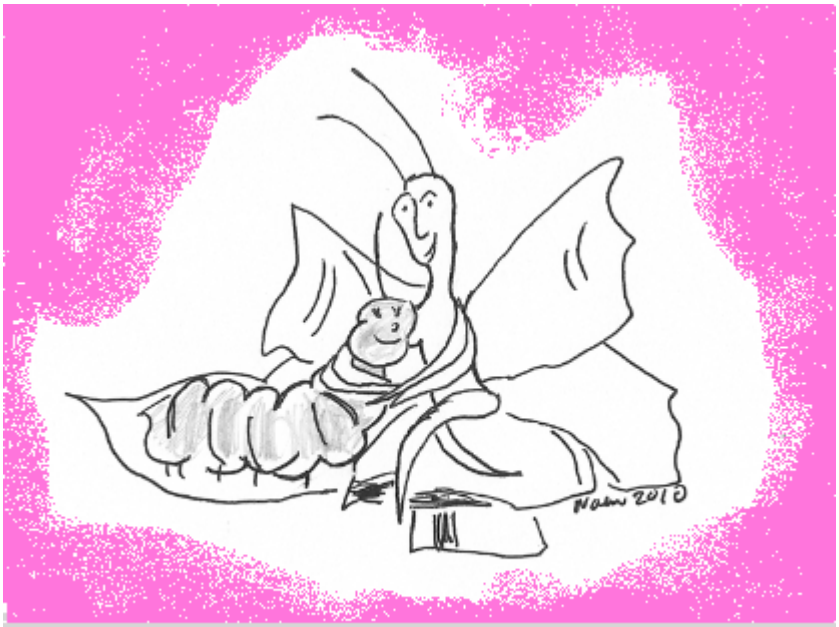
# Points about Periods: what you may have forgotten to explain about menstruation

She’s eyeing your lip gloss and won’t wear clothes with animals or hearts on them anymore. She’s begging you for a Facebook account, but still talks to her dolls and holds her dad’s hand in public. Yes, your daughter is on the edge of puberty and you’ve been talking to her about her upcoming body changes and getting her period. But your own memory of early adolescence from a couple of decades ago is a little fuzzy. Beyond the basic anatomical changes, did you cover everything? Here is a smattering of questions about menstruation which may not have occurred to you, but we hear in the office:



*Sit down. I want to talk to you about something. Have you ever noticed that your body looks different from mommy's?*

**From the girls: Does a period hurt just like when I cut myself?**

In a kid’s experience, blood is associated with an injury and therefore pain. Reassure your daughter that bleeding during a period is not like the bleeding of a cut. Yes, you can mention

that she may feel cramps, but usually not initially.

**From the moms: When can she wear a tampon?**

At any point. Several manufacturers make tampons especially designed for teens. Do not worry; even for a virgin, a tampon will not cause any injury. Just like you've taught her everything, you may need to teach her how to insert and take out a tampon.Warning—do not teach her five minutes before she leaves for the beach during her period. For some girls, removing the tampon is more difficult than inserting it. Teach her/ talk it through when she is not menstruating. Remind her to change tampons frequently- young girls in particular are more vulnerable to Toxic Shock Syndrome.

**From both: It's been months, how long until her period is regular?**

It can take around two years for periods to come regularly. Once they are regular, the average frequency is every 28 days, but can vary from 21 to 36 days.

**From the girls: Will I know when I get my period?**

Let your girls know that when they see their first period it may not be a bright red blotch of blood on their underpants. Explain that dried blood looks like brownish streaks; they may confuse it with stool.

**From both: In this age of skinny jeans and jeggings, where to hide a pad or tampon during school?**

If she doesn't carry a purse, then have your daughter try inside the cuff of a sock or tucked in the waistband of pants. I have seen a thin pad hidden under the tongue of a sneaker.

**From the girls: Do I go to the nurse's office if I get my period for the first time during school?**

Not necessarily, unless you are looking for pads. This is not

an illness.

Remind your tween to let you know when she starts getting her period and that you will keep it private. One girl told me she did not tell her mother for months. The reason? Her neighbor's mother had given her neighbor a "Red" party in honor of her neighbor's first period. Everyone wore red to the party and there was even a red cake. My patient was appalled at the attention and avoided telling her own mother until well after her menstrual cycle was well established.

Also, you can help your tween track how heavy her flow is by checking her supply of pads and tampons. Excessively heavy periods cause anemia from blood loss and young girls can be unaware how much blood loss is normal. Remind her that if she has to change a pad once an hour, or if her period drags on over a week (average is three to seven days) she needs to tell you about it. Even without excessive blood loss, make sure she eats iron containing foods (eg. spinach, lean red meats) to help prevent anemia.

If you get overwhelmed by all the facts about menstruation which need to be explained, keep in mind this conversation I once had during a check-up. During the visit I gave a young teen a moment alone to ask questions privately. As the door closed behind her mother, I asked the girl if she had any questions about adolescence.

"No questions," she declared." I wear a bra… I bleed every month. There's nothing else to know."

Wish everything about the teenage years could be so simple.

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