

## **Not lip gloss: men should at least get the gist when it comes to periods**

At first, I thought someone threw up spurts of blood. Various shades of red streaked several pieces of paper in the toilet and the colors started to seep into the clear water. As an eight year old who would frantically rush for a band-aid, anytime I detected a sliver of blood on me, it was more than enough to put me in a frenzy.

In a run throughout the house, I went to alert the first adult I found, which happened to be my mother.

With two tangled tufts of hair on both sides of her forehead and a strained smile, she listened intently as I told her what was wrong. After I finished rambling, she calmed me down and went to clean up the mess.

Later on, she admitted that she just wasn't feeling well. Between her pursed lips and unnatural behavior — nothing like her typical amiable self — I knew to stop asking questions. Regardless, I monitored her mouth for the rest of the day, ensuring they were not lined with blood from throwing up again. Yet the true source of the blood was one I couldn't fathom at the time, at least not for the next six years.

My mom was on her period. And aside from this slight mishap, she was highly competent at concealing it. My brother and I were completely in the dark. From the way my father acted, he was clearly indifferent as well, with menstruation being far from his area of expertise.

Accordingly, until ninth grade, **the only period I knew of was in English class.** During menstrual product ads, the content was so roundabout (not even revealing a drop of blood), so I always misunderstood or had no idea what they were talking about. If someone showed me a tampon, I'd probably say something along the lines of:

“Nice keychain.”

“Why'd you pick out such a plain air freshener for your car? The ones shaped as trees are the best ones.”

“Sorry I'm not too interested in lip gloss.”

In my defense, those colored tubes still look similar to make-up.

Nevertheless, my Health and Wellness class in my freshman year extinguished these misconceptions. Taught in a straightforward, cut and dry manner, I learned the ins and outs of the menstrual cycle. My mom still doesn't explicitly say when she is on her period, but full transparency wasn't what I wanted — it was knowing I could help her if she needed it, which reassured me.

Across a wider population, though, men's lack of knowledge regarding menstruation is concerning and very much like me before that class. In a INTIMA study conducted by YouGov, in August 2021, with a sample size of 1,091 males, 52 percent of males in the study wrongly thought the menstrual cycle lasted 1-6 days (actually 21-35 days) and only 41 percent correctly identified what menstruation is.

Although improvement in male awareness and educatedness surrounding menstruation is key, evidenced by these studies, it shouldn't limit me, or other males, from finding ways to help out. It doesn't take a doctor to do these things:

1. Abstain from the phrase, “Their acting like they are on their period,” or any similar stigmatized statement with a derogatory purpose. Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) can alter behaviors and emotions temporarily, so mood swings during this time can be uncontrollable. While men will never fully comprehend the pain and inconvenience of periods, we can forgive bouts of irritability or misguided anger when they do occur.

2. Be calm. If a person reaches out because **they are on their period**, having two distraught people isn't a formula for success. Provide swift aid in emergency situations and take it step by step.
3. Relieve their stress through small actions. Try to satisfy food cravings, help with chores around the house and don't be scared to stock up on additional menstrual products if necessary. Due to cramping and bleeding, period pain can last anywhere from 48-72 hours. So while **navigating the menstrual health section may be an unfamiliar inconvenience**, just be glad it'll be a painless ten minutes.

After completing all this, they might even thank you. Well, on second thought, it does depend on how severe their PMS is.

Overall there will always be an element of foreignness when males assimilate information on menstruation. Despite that, no one's asking us to be experts, but we have to realize this is something that **all the menstruating people** we love commonly experience, according to UN Women, for an average of six years over the course of their lifetime. Consequently, us males should show a bit of empathy, and when it comes to periods, we should at least get the gist.

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Blood stains

First person I questioned

Her hair/reaction

Ignorance— only period I knew was english, menstrual vs menopause, mistake tampon for lip gloss or keychain

Family situation

Statistics

How males can learn+help— well never really know the pain or inconvenience of what its like

Lets not use the phrase are you on your period

No we don't need to be experts, but since this is something that all the females we love commonly experience, we should show a bit of empathy and at least get the gist.