



Periods

How it all starts: diary extracts on my first period

By Annie Girl

14 July

It's a little while now since Mam bought me a couple of bras. I was quite pleased with myself because I let Mam measure me and we asked the woman in the shop to help. My older sister was really embarrassed. She didn't even want Mam to show them to the woman at the checkout!

Mam said I that I probably would get my periods quite soon. She asked me had anyone else in 6th class got theirs. I said that Sheila had – everyone knew that she'd had them since she was 10. Some people say you can get them when you're 9.

16 July

I think Mam expects my periods are going to start any day. Today when we were unpacking the shopping she said she'd got sanitary towels – you know – the ones that are wrapped individually. She said she didn't think it was very "green", but that I might feel more comfortable about carrying them in my school bag. She also said there were tampons in the bathroom cupboard, if I wanted them. I didn't tell her, but I've already tried a sanitary towel and a tampon. I think I'll use a sanitary towel – the ones you stick inside your knickers – until I feel more comfortable using a tampon. Mam said to be careful using tampons – to read the instructions and always remember to change them every 4-8 hours and remove them when my period is finished.

20 July

My Mam really is becoming a bit of a pain about periods. She asked me today did I really understand what they were. I said of course I did, but she went on talking just the same. She said that periods were just a part of my menstrual cycle – that means like a regular, monthly thing. She said that blood comes out of my vagina for about 2-8 days every month and that's why I need to wear towels or tampons and I've to remember to change them regularly, in case they leak into my knickers.

She told me a story about her sister putting a sanitary towel down the toilet and how the toilet got blocked and overflowed all over the place. So she suggested that I roll them up and put them in a rubbish bin.

She said the reason the blood comes is due to a process that starts 3 weeks before. I thought she was joking. She said that for 2 weeks a tiny ovum, like a little egg has been travelling from my ovaries where the egg is made through my fallopian tubes to my uterus. I didn't know I had all these different bits inside me and I felt quite interested in them. She said she 'd draw me a picture. I decided to stick the picture in my diary.

My Mam's not good at drawing!

Mam said – by the time the egg reaches the uterus, the lining of the uterus is full and rich and soft. If the egg is going to stay for a while and become a baby it would have to meet a male sperm and that would have to come from a boy or a man, through sexual intercourse.

If the egg isn't staying in the uterus, the uterus doesn't need all that lining, so the lining, made up of blood and tiny pieces of tissues, dribbles out. It passes through the small opening in the cervix, down through the vagina and out of my vaginal opening. About 2 weeks later, another egg pops out of one of the ovaries and the whole thing – a cycle she called it – starts again. I pretended I know all that.

21 July

I'm lying in bed thinking about all the things that Mam told me. I remember the talk my teacher gave us at school. She's really nice. She talked to all the class together – girls and boys- about periods.

When I think about all these things I realise there is a sort of plan to growing up. Oddly, I don't feel scared – it feels a bit like waiting for something exciting to happen. Mam said some women called periods, "the curse", or "my aunt" – I heard other names in school. She said a cousin of hers called it " my friend" – Mam seemed to think this was a good one because sometimes periods stop and start a bit anyway, and it takes a while to get regular, she said.

My plan is to put 2 sanitary towels (in the nice coloured packets) into my school bag and wait.

7 August

Guess what? I think I started today. I'm not exactly sure, but I got this funny brown stain on my knickers. It looks like a bit like dried blood. My tummy feels kind of crampy. I feel like this is my own private secret. I don't want to tell anyone, not because I'm embarrassed but I feel very happy in myself.

8 August

I got the same stain today. I forgot to use a towel, I suppose I'm not used to the whole idea yet. I still don't want to tell anyone. We're on holidays and I'm just lying around reading books and I feel very comfortable. My cat has been lying on my tummy all day and so I feel nice and warm.

9 August

That's it, end of my secret.

Mam collected up the washing today. I knew she'd noticed when she picked up my underwear, but she said nothing. I think I would have been embarrassed if she had. Later on, when we were alone she said she noticed the blood on my knickers and asked was I alright. I said I was fine but didn't really want to talk about it. She gave me a hug and didn't say anything else except that if I did want to ask anything I should ask her or my teacher, or I could look it up in the books that she's bought.

Thanks Mam.

Low down in the female abdomen there are two ovaries. Each month one ovum (egg) is released. The ovum travels down the fallopian tube and moves towards the uterus. You may notice a whitish discharge from your vagina at the time of ovulation.

The uterus has thick muscular walls and many blood vessels in its inner lining. Every month this lining thickens in preparation for a fertilised ovum to embed itself in it and start developing into a foetus. When fertilisation does not take place, the ovum disintegrates, the lining of the uterus breaks down and you have a period. A period is bleeding from the vagina which occurs on a regular basis

about once a month. Periods can start any time between the age of 9 and 18 but the most usual time is about a year after your breasts have begun to develop. Periods occur because the lining of the uterus breaks down and causes small amount of bleeding from the vagina.

Another name for period is menstruation which comes from the latin word mensis meaning monthly. On average a woman has a period about every 4 weeks lasting from 2 to about 8 days but the average is 4.