

Menstrual periods / Jesus heals a bleeding woman

Tammy: We women have things that we only talk about among ourselves, don't we? So today, let's shut the door, make a cup of tea, and have a private talk together about something all women experience.

Hi, I'm Tammy. Welcome to *Women of Hope* again. Today, we're talking about menstruation, or our monthly periods. We thought it would be great to share this as women together because it is something we all have in common and I'm sure many of us have problems like the ones we will be talking about.

Carol: Often we have questions about menstruation but it can be awkward to talk about, because, well it's a very private thing. Or maybe you've had a younger girl, or another woman ask you about women's problems. We hope you'll find this useful as we chat about some of the things we experience as women. To help us, we've asked Julie to join us again, as she's a nurse who works with women and girls. We're going to ask her some questions that you might wonder about. Welcome, Julie.

Julie: Hello; I'm happy to be here with you.

Tammy: I can remember my first period. It was very exciting; I really began to feel like I was changing from a girl into a woman. It was also a bit scary and there were many other changes happening in my body. I was so glad my mother told me what to expect, and what was happening. She made me feel that it was all normal.

Julie: Yes, starting periods is a normal part of puberty for girls.

Tammy: Julie, can you explain what *puberty* means?

Julie: Puberty is the time when our sex hormones become active. These hormones cause many changes that turn a girl into a woman. For example, a girl begins to grow body hair and her breasts begin to develop. She often grows taller at this time, too, as well as starting her periods. Let me explain how periods happen.

It all starts with two tiny organs in the abdomen called ovaries. These lie on either side of the uterus, or womb. At puberty these ovaries become active. They produce hormones, natural chemicals that control our monthly cycle. About halfway through this cycle, the hormones cause our ovaries to produce tiny eggs. This is called *ovulation*, and this is the time when a married woman is most likely to get pregnant. The lining of the womb gets thicker, with many blood vessels. This incredible process prepares the womb to carry a baby, if we become pregnant. If we don't become pregnant, then the lining of the womb drops away along with some blood. It comes out of the vagina, between the legs. This is called menstruation or a period, and it's quite normal and healthy.

Tammy: Help us by explaining what a normal period is like.

Julie: Well...it varies from woman to woman, so it's hard to say what's 'normal', Bleeding from a period lasts about 5 to 8 days. Some women have dark coloured blood, others have bright red blood. Often there are some clots. Usually we have a total blood loss of about 4-12 teaspoons full, during the few days of the period. It's common to have a little pain in the back or lower abdomen. It's also normal to feel a little bloated and have tender breasts. Some women have all these symptoms, but even though they have pain, it's still 'normal'.

The *average* age when periods start is around 13 years old, but it's considered normal to start some time between the ages of 11 and 15. Some girls start even as young as 7 or 8 years old, and it seems to be getting younger, especially in more developed countries.

Tammy: Do you have any advice about how to manage during the period?

Julie: Well, it depends on what's available for you. In many places, women use cloth pads to absorb the blood flow. They wash and dry the cloths to reuse them, or throw them away. In other places they buy sanitary pads, made of absorbent cotton fibre, and throw them away or burn them after use. I remember my mother told me that it's easiest to use sanitary pads at first but that they shouldn't be flushed down the toilet because they could block the pipes.

Tammy: Some women buy and use *tampons*. Can you explain them?

Julie: Tampons are small, tightly-rolled-up sticks of cotton, smaller than your finger, which are placed in the vagina. You can't see them or feel them in use, and they're easy to carry in your bag or pocket.

They're very useful for heavier flow because they are very absorbent.

Tampons can be used safely by a virgin. They're thrown away after use. It's very important not to forget and leave one inside at the end of your period.

Whatever you use, make sure everything is clean, and wash your hands before and after changing.

Sanitary pads or tampons generally need changing every 3 to 4 hours. You can carry on with everyday life during a period and there is no *medical* reason why you shouldn't prepare food or wash - in fact, it's good to wash more often than usual. You can play sport, or even swim with a tampon. In fact exercise can help ease the muscles and reduce pain during periods.

I think it's important to say that periods are not a sickness; they are not dirty but a good part of being a woman. There's no need for a girl or woman to be shut away at these times, or treated any differently than usual.

Carol: Thanks, Julie. That was a lot of good information.

We've been talking about our monthly periods, and saying that periods are a normal part of being a woman. But I know some women find them difficult or painful. Can you explain the problems they might have?

Julie: Sure. First there's the common problem of *heavy* periods. This can be really embarrassing and upsetting; sometimes it stops women from going out of the house on those days. If heavy periods make life difficult, or your periods become heavier than usual, then you ought to see a doctor or health worker.

If you're losing more blood than normal, you might find you get very tired. This is because you're losing *iron* in the blood. The health worker might suggest you take iron tablets and eat lots of green leafy vegetables and some red meat: these supply iron. There are also some tablets that can help reduce the blood loss.

Painful periods are another common problem. Have you suffered from that? Most women have at least a little cramping pain in the first 2 days of their period, especially when they're young. I've tried simple painkillers like paracetamol, and an anti-inflammatory painkiller called ibuprofen that really

helps to relieve most of the pain...you must *always* take it with food. You can use a heat pack or hot water bottle, or have a warm bath for comfort. Try to do a little light exercise during your period and try to relax.

Carol: What if the pain is really bad?

Julie: About 1 in 10 women have very severe period pain. So if the pain stops you doing your normal things or if periods change and become more painful than usual, you should see a doctor. The doctor might send you to a specialist for more tests. Sometimes the cause of the pain can be treated with medicines, or an operation. Often, women find they have much less pain after they have had a baby.

Carol: I know that some of my friends have *irregular* periods where the time gap between then is different from month to month.

Julie: Yes, periods should ideally come in a regular cycle. The cycle normally lasts between 21 to 35 days. If they are not regular then it might mean you're not ovulating every month. This can make it difficult to become pregnant. So if you have irregular periods, you should see your health worker in case something else is causing it. However, irregular periods are common and normal in the few years before menopause when the periods stop.

Tammy: What if a girl hasn't started her periods by the age of 16 years, is that a problem?

Julie: Maybe not, but she should visit her health worker to find out why. Often puberty is late because the girl is underweight, but it can also have other causes. Often it can be treated with better food, or injections of hormones.

Tammy: What if you have bleeding at other times in the month?

Julie: You should definitely see a doctor, if you have bleeding in between periods, or after sex, or after your normal periods have finished. It might not be dangerous but there are some serious causes such as infection, or cancer, and the doctor needs to check.

Carol: I want to ask about premenstrual tension or PMT. We all know about the way many women feel in the days before a period is due. We can have mood swings, and feel tired and irritable. People

make silly jokes about it, but it can really be awful. What can you tell us about it?

Julie: Yes: we can feel bloated and aching, and moody, in the few days before menstruation. Some women have food cravings and tender breasts. Most of us experience *some* of these things before our periods. It's called pre-menstrual tension, or premenstrual syndrome, if it affects our relationships with friends and family, and makes it hard to do our work. And yes, for some women it is really bad.

There is medical treatment that can help. However, there are some simple changes to how we live that can help.

To feel less bloated you could try to eat less salt and sugar, and eat smaller, more frequent meals, of whole grains and fruit and vegetables. Dairy products like milk, that are high in calcium, can also help with the symptoms. Try to avoid alcohol, and caffeine drinks like coffee, tea and cola for those days. Stretching and breathing exercises and relaxation can help to make you less tense and sore. If you have tender breasts Ibuprofen and paracetamol are common tablets that can help.

But if those simple changes don't make you feel better, then see your doctor or healthcare worker. There are some hormone pills and antidepressants that can help, particularly for the emotional symptoms. Your periods shouldn't spoil your life and your relationships.

Tammy: So, to sum things up, it sounds like there is wide variation in what's considered normal.

Julie: Yes. But if you have problems with your periods that affect your everyday life, then you should see your health worker. There may be a problem that can be treated. And, if you have bleeding that is not your period then you should definitely see a doctor.

Carol: Thank you Julie. It's always good to know more about how our bodies work.

Tammy: Welcome back to Women of Hope. We've been talking about women's health, especially about our menstrual periods. Now I want to tell you about a woman who had a *big* problem, which was very personal and private. It was also embarrassing and it made her very unhappy. Her story is told in God's word, the Bible. Let's hear the story from the Bible.

Tammy: There was a woman who had been leaking blood for twelve years. She had been to many doctors to see if they could help her, but they had all failed. They had tried lots of things, but she didn't get better, in fact she got worse! And she had spent all the money she had trying to get help!

Carol: Can you imagine how discouraged she must have been. Probably she thought there was no hope of healing. (Mk 5: 25-26)

But imagine her life as well. Because she was bleeding all the time, this meant it was difficult for her to be away from home for any length of time. She would often have to wash her undergarments and the homemade padding she used. Her condition probably meant that her husband was not as interested in her now too, so this would have made her very unhappy. Maybe she couldn't have any more children. And certainly losing all that blood would have made her weak and sick.

Tammy: It must have been miserable. People would stay away from her because anyone who had contact with her would be regarded as ceremonially unclean or contaminated. It's still like that for women in some cultures these days, if they have bleeding problems. I think that's very sad - it's not their fault.

Carol: I imagine she wouldn't go out among crowds as she would always be worried that there would be bloodstains on her skirt or that she might smell badly. Has that ever happened to you?

After 12 long years, she must have thought there wasn't any hope of a solution. The doctors she went to had not been able to help her.

Tammy: Well, let's go back to the story from the Bible.

Now this woman heard stories about someone who was healing sick people. His name was Jesus, and his followers said he was the saviour that God had promised to send. He performed real miracles, and many people were being healed of all sorts of diseases. This gave her *hope* that he could change her life and make her better. She decided to find this man and ask for his help. It would have been hard, but one day she joined a crowd following Jesus. She was desperate and determined to get his help. The crowd was pressing close and jostling each other, but she managed to get up close behind him. Then she reached forward and touched his clothing, thinking, "If I can only touch his clothes, I'll be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she was healed. She felt the change in her body and knew she was free from her suffering at last.

At once Jesus knew that power had gone out of him. He turned and asked the crowd: "Who touched me?" His close followers were amazed and said, "You can see how great the crowd is, pushing around you. So how can you ask who touched you?" Jesus said: "I know that someone touched me; power has gone out of me." And he kept looking around the crowd waiting for someone to speak.

The woman knew that she could not get away quietly: she would have to confess she had touched Jesus. So she fell down at his feet, trembling with fear, and told him all about her problem, and that she had been healed.

Jesus said to her: "Daughter, your faith has caused you to be healed. Go in peace, and be freed from your suffering."

That's the end of this story from God's word.

Carol: I love this story. I think if I had been her, I would have gone home and had a party! She must have been so happy.

Tammy: Yes, I'm sure she was. She was a brave woman, wasn't she, going into the crowd with her condition. The crowd would have heard all she said, and it was such an embarrassing subject.

Did you wonder why Jesus asked this woman to admit that she had touched him? She would rather have kept her embarrassing secret. Maybe he wanted the crowd to know what had happened and to hear about her faith and healing. It certainly wasn't because he wanted to shame her. Did you notice how gently he spoke to her? He called her 'daughter'. What an affectionate word to use! I think that it wasn't enough for Jesus to heal her - he wanted to get to know her. He wanted her to know that God knew her and loved her as a daughter, and valued the faith she showed.

Carol: I was thinking about what Jesus said - that her *faith* had caused her to be healed. Do you think the power to heal came from *her*, or her faith? Or do you think there was magic in his clothing? No, the power came from Jesus himself. He said that he felt the power go out of him. But her faith was part of it - she believed he could help her, and because of that belief, she reached out to him.

That's like us too, you know! If we want God to forgive us, or answer our prayers, we need to reach out in faith. God wants to pour out his blessings on us, but we can only *receive* God's blessings when we open our hands and hearts to him.

Tammy: I wonder if you have a private problem, or an embarrassing problem. You might not want to tell anyone else, for fear of being shamed. You know, you can tell Jesus about it and ask for his help. He won't draw away from you or embarrass you. He will help you. Isn't it good to know that he looks at you with compassion and love? He calls you 'Daughter', when you turn to him with faith. He gives you hope.

Carol: Well, It's time for us to go already. Thank you for being with us as we've talked about these women's things. Maybe you would like to tell us about your life, or ask any questions, we would love to hear from you. You can contact us in care of this station or at Women of Hope.

Tammy: The email address is TWRWomenofHope@TWR.org. That's TWRWomenofHope@TWR.org. Or if you missed a program or want to hear it again visit our website TWRWomenofHope.org. or visit our Facebook page.

Carol: Remember, God wants to pour out his blessings on us, but we can only receive God's blessings when we open our hands and hearts to him. We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings.

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