



सत्यमेव जयते  
ग्रामीण विकास मंत्रालय  
भारत सरकार



# MENSTRUAL HYGIENE AND RELATED BEHAVIOURS

## Facilitator Guide for SHG Meetings



**Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)**

Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India



## Dear Facilitator

This facilitator guide on “**Menstrual Hygiene and Related Behaviours**”, is designed to help all facilitators under State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs) in rolling out the Flipbook and disseminating key messages within the SHG groups and other community cadres. This session is part of a training package on Food, Nutrition, Health and WASH (FNHW) consisting of Flip books, Facilitator guides, Posters, Counselling Cards and Stickers.

The objective of this training is to create awareness and provide information to the participants on the significance of menstrual hygiene management and to empower SRLM staff, cadres and community at large with knowledge to improve the behaviour related practices pertaining to menstrual hygiene and menstruation related other information. This knowledge may consequently help to adopt better behaviour and practices that will improve the menstrual hygiene practices in the individual SHG women and their families. We all know that menstrual hygiene results in good health and higher productivity leading to reduction in poverty and improvement in quality of life.

It should be kept in mind that this orientation package, although meant for SHG women, should serve as reference material for the entire family. Information provided under each session through flipbooks and this guide should be seen as collective learning for the family, and each member of the family needs to play their part to ensure that the messages are adopted by them in everyday lives.

The responsibility of getting these behaviors imbibed does not lie with women only; the men/husbands/older boys in the family need to ensure making arrangements for whatever is required to follow these practices on FNHW.

## Objectives

**After going through the module, the facilitator will be able to:**

- Explain to the group that Menstruation is a normal biological process.
- Explain to the group on what points should be kept in mind for menstrual hygiene.
- Explain what can be done to deal with common problems faced during menstruation.
- Explain the issues that women may face during menopause.



One should understand that menstruation is a completely natural process that all women go through. It is just a simple difference between men and women, it is not something that makes women dirty or makes men better than women. Women should not be made to be embarrassed or feel ashamed because of their menstruation. It is a biological process which makes a woman ready for childbirth and no one would be alive if women did not menstruate.

### ■ ■ Case Study

Anita's daughter Priya is 12 years old, one day she came back early from school, crying profusely. Anita was very scared when she saw her and ran to her, and found Priya's kurta stained with blood. She immediately understood that Priya's periods had started and that was the reason for her crying, since she knew nothing about menstruation from before.

Anita explained to her, gave her a sanitary napkin and told her that this was a normal thing. Later in the day, Priya experienced stomach ache and did not want to eat anything. Next day Priya refused to go to school since she was traumatised and ashamed of what had happened the previous day.

- What should have Anita done to save her daughter this embarrassment?
- What should be done to relieve Priya of the problems she was facing?

**Note:** Do not give any answers here, just listen to what the group has to say.

### ■ ■ Initiate the Session

It is very important that in this session facilitators do not allow the participants to perpetuate negative cultural taboos and myths. More importantly, ensure that participants truly understand, with cultural and gender sensitivity, the need for menstrual hygiene, issues around common problems, how to handle them and menopausal concerns.

### ■ ■ Step 1: Setting the Context

Initiate discussion asking the participants to share their experience on menstruation. Explain to them the following points;

- Menstruation is the discharge of blood from the vagina every month in adolescent girls and women.
- This is a normal physiological process, and there is nothing to panic about.
- Menstruation starts during adolescence for every girl and it is a process that prepares the body to conceive.

- Menstruation usually begins at the age of 9–15 years, which is called menarche and ends by the age of 45–55 years, which is called menopause.
- Menstruation usually lasts for around 5 days every month, at an interval of 28 days (minimum 3 days and maximum 7 days), hence colloquially it is also called Monthly.
- We should inform our daughters about menstruation and other related things at the age of 9–10 years, so that they are prepared.

## Step 2: What are the significant practices to be noted for menstrual hygiene

Ask the participants on what are the appropriate and safe things to be used during menstruation, what hygiene practices should be adopted and also what should be the nutrition considerations during menstruation.

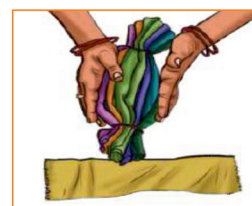
### Key points during Menstruation:

**What to Use**–Ask the group what they usually use during menstruation and if they are aware of the problems they may face, if clean material is not used.

- Use sanitary pad or a clean cotton cloth only because they have more ability to absorb blood and it is not harmful to the skin
- It prevents problems like itching in the genitals, rashes between the thighs and infection in the uterus.
- Change the sanitary pad or cloth at least 3–4 times (ie 6–8 hours) during the day/24 hours
- If using a cloth, re-use only after washing with soap thoroughly and dried in the sun
- Sanitary pads are available in any medicine store, makeup or grocery store
- Sanitary pads are also available with ASHA (at the cost of only Rs 1/pad under Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadhi Kendra)



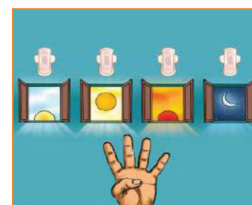
Sanitary Pad



Clean Cotton Cloth



Wash the cloth with soap and dry in the sun before every use



Change the pad / cloth 3–4 times a day

At this point, initiate discussion on what do women commonly use in their village during menstruation. Lead the discussion on the fact that there were times when women did not wear an undergarment, especially panties and therefore using appropriate material such as a sanitary pad or clean cloth was difficult.



Potential risks of poor menstrual hygiene management It is assumed that the risk of infection (including sexually transmitted infection) is higher than normal during menstruation because the plug of mucus normally found at the opening of the cervix is dislodged and the cervix opens to allow blood to pass out of the body. In theory this creates a pathway for bacteria to travel back into the uterus and pelvic cavity.

Certain practices are more likely to increase the risk of infection. Using unclean rags, especially if they are inserted into the vagina, can introduce or support the growth of unwanted bacteria that could lead to infection. Some girls and women may roll up sanitary pads and insert these into the vagina. Prolonged use of the same pad will also increase the risk of infection. Douching (forcing liquid into the vagina) upsets the normal balance of yeast in the vagina and makes infection more likely. Wiping from back to front following defecation or urination causes contamination with harmful anal bacteria, such as *Escherichia coli* (E.coli), which can also be transmitted from the rectum to the urinary tract and/or vagina during sex.

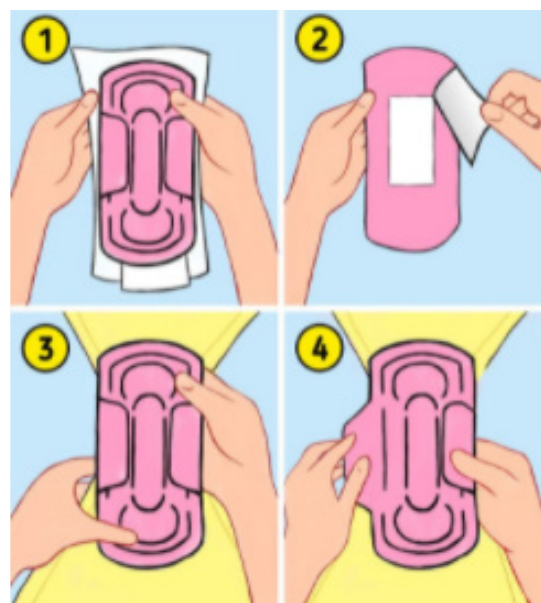
The risk of passing on, or in some cases contracting, blood-borne diseases (eg HIV or Hepatitis B) through unprotected sex is also increased during menstruation. This is because the highest concentrations of HIV and Hepatitis B are found in blood, with lower concentrations found in other body fluids such as semen and vaginal secretions.

These additional risks mean that ensuring good hygiene during menstruation is very important.

Use this opportunity to generate conversation on whether this is still prevalent and if yes, inform them that clean undergarments should be worn for infection prevention and specially during menstruation to hold the sanitary napkins, which is hygienically important and safe. Now, take the group through the following steps on how to use a sanitary pad/napkin.

**Sanitary pads come in different sizes** – they can be thin for when you're not bleeding much, regular, or thick for heavier bleeding. You can use whichever kind feels most comfortable to you.

- Remove the paper attached to the back sticky side of the pad.
- Stick the pad in your panty using the sticky strip on the back.
- Some pads are with wings, these wings should be turned on the outer side and stuck to the panty, this makes the pad more secure so that it does not move.



- Make sure that the panty one wears is of the right size - neither too tight nor too loose.
- Change your pad every few hours, or when it's soaked with blood.
- Wrap used pads in the wrapper or toilet paper and throw them in the trash. Flushing used pads or wrappers down the toilet will clog it up.

Now ask the women about their everyday habits and practices during menstruation. Discuss with them the common myths that exist in their family or community on what women and girls should do/not do during this period.

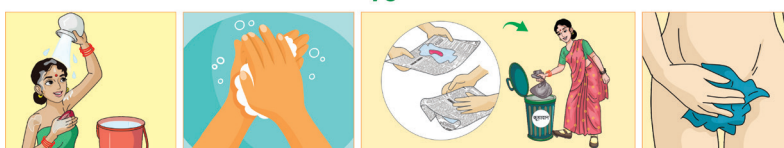
### **Inform the group on the following points -**

#### **Key Hygiene habits -**

- Do not use ash, sand, dirty and synthetic clothes
- Take bath daily during menstruation, clean your private parts and wear washed and clean clothes
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap after every change of sanitary pad or cloth.

#### **Menstrual Hygiene Related**

- Wash and clean the outer skin of your vagina with water and dry yourself with a clean cloth.



- The used sanitary pad or cloth should be wrapped in paper and thrown in the dustbin or buried in the soil.

#### **Nutrition Related**



#### **Key Nutrition habits**

- Special attention to diet during menstruation is needed.
- Eat iron-rich food like green leafy vegetables, Meat and fish, pulses and beans etc.
- Drink plenty of water during menstruation to prevent dehydration.
- If there is excessive bleeding, take iron tablets with the advice of a doctor.



Inform the participants on the potential risks to health of poor menstrual hygiene by referring to the table below -

Practice	Health Risk
Unclean sanitary pads/ materials	Bacteria may cause local infections or travel up the vagina and enter the uterine cavity.
changing pads infrequently	Wet pads can cause skin irritation which can then become infected if the skin becomes broken.
Insertion of unclean material into vagina	bacteria potentially have easier access to the cervix and the uterine cavity
Using highly absorbent tampons during a time of light blood loss	Toxic Shock Syndrome
Wiping from back to front following urination or defecation	Makes the introduction of bacteria from the bowel into the vagina (or Urethra) more likely.
Unprotected Sex	Possible increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (see below) or the transmission of HIV or Hepatitis B during menstruation.
Unsafe disposal of used sanitary materials or blood	Risk of infecting others, especially with Hepatitis B (HIV and other Hepatitis viruses do not survive for long outside the body and post a minimal risk except where there is direct contact with blood just leaving the body)
Frequent douching (forcing liquid into the vagina)	Can facilitate the introduction of bacteria into the uterine cavity.
Lack of hand-washing after changing a sanitary towel	Can facilitate the spread of infections such as Hepatitis B or Thrush.

### **Step 3: Common discomforts and danger symptoms during menstruation**

Ask the participants about the normal problems that a woman faces during menstruation and what can be done to feel comfortable. Mention here that some discomfort is common during this period and women should be careful about their nutrition and hygiene along with other suggestive measures.

## **There may be some common experiences during menstruation, such as:**

**Irregular Menstruation:** In the beginning, menstruation cycle may be at a short (at 3 weeks) or long (at 6 weeks) interval. This cycle usually becomes regular in 2 to 3 years. If the irregularity continues, consult a doctor.

**Excessive menstruation (excessive bleeding):** When menstruation lasts 8 days or more. When the napkin gets completely wet within an hour and there are blood clots along with blood secretion.

**Painful menstruation:** It is natural to have some pain in the days of menstruation along with nausea, headache, back pain and abdominal pain. In addition, there may be other discomfort such as swelling, fatigue and irritability from a few days before menstruation.

## **How to deal with discomforts during menstruation**

**To get relief from common problems usually the following simple measures work:**


- Take a warm water bath if there is pain in the lower abdomen during menstruation.
- Use a hot water bag or put a hot towel or water bottle with a thick cloth wrapped around it for a hot massage.
- Gently massage your belly or back, can ask someone in the family to massage your back lightly.
- Ginger tea or herbal tea sometimes also provide relief.
- If there is too much or too little bleeding during menstruation, irregular or extremely painful menstruation, contact the ASHA or ANM of your area immediately.







**Although the above are common discomforts, it is important to know when to contact ANM or ASHA or seek medical help:** Having a period for more than eight days; menstruation/bleeding twice in a month; Severe pain in abdomen, back, waist or head during menstruation, which does not feel better with home remedies; Excessive bleeding (when it is time to change the pad within an hour/two hours), continuous/excessive white discharge - these are all times when one should reach out for help.

## **Myths and Taboos around Menstrual Hygiene**

A number of myths and taboos have been associated with menstruation. Ask the group members about what kind of myths or restrictions are prevalent in their households and their area. Discuss them with the group.





<p style="text-align: center;"> <b>MYTH</b></p> <p>During their periods, girls are impure.</p> <p>Girls having their periods should not cook or visit sacred places.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> <b>FACT</b></p> <p>Periods are just nature's way of saying you are growing up.</p> <p>There is nothing impure about periods.</p>	<p><b>MYTH</b></p> <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">X</p> <p>Menstruating women should not enter the kitchen and cook and not touch pickles.</p>	<p><b>FACT</b></p> <p style="font-size: 2em; color: green;">✓</p> <p>Scientific techniques prove that menstruation in no way contaminates food.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> <b>Myth</b></p> <p>Periods are a personal issue.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"> <b>Fact</b></p> <p>Periods are a human rights and public issue. In 2014, the United Nations declared that Menstrual Hygiene was a public health issue.</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: 0.8em;">   </p>
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## Step 4: What is Menopause and what are the problems women face during menopause

Menopause is the time that marks the end of your menstrual cycles. It's diagnosed after you've gone 12 months without a menstrual period. Menopause can happen in your 40s or 50s.

Menopause is a natural biological process. But the physical symptoms, such as hot flashes, and emotional symptoms of menopause may disrupt your sleep, lower your energy or affect emotional health. There are many effective treatments available, from lifestyle adjustments to hormone therapy. Signs and symptoms, including changes in menstruation can vary among women. Most likely, you'll experience some irregularity in your periods before they end.

Skipping periods during perimenopause is common and expected. Often, menstrual periods will skip a month and return, or skip several months and then start monthly cycles again for a few months. Periods also tend to happen on shorter cycles, so they are closer together. Despite irregular periods, pregnancy is possible. If you've skipped a period but aren't sure you've started the menopausal transition, consider a pregnancy test.

Preventive health care as you age may include recommended health screening tests, such as colonoscopy, mammography and triglyceride screening. Your doctor might recommend other tests and exams, too, including thyroid testing if suggested by your history, and breast and pelvic exams. Always seek medical advice if you have bleeding from your vagina after menopause.

Now, initiate discussion on what the group members understand by menopause. If there are older (around 45+) women in the group, ask them if they have started experiencing any signs of menopause. Explain to the group members the following -

### What is Menopause?

Menopause is a stage in life when your menstruation / periods stop. This is a normal sign of aging and this process marks the end of your reproductive years. Menopause usually occurs at the age of 45 - 55 years. If you have not had periods for at least 12 months, then you may be going through the period of menopause.

## Why does this happen?

After a certain age women's ovaries stop the production of eggs and there is a lack of hormone "estrogen" in the body and we experience symptoms of menopause.

## What are the symptoms/discomfort women feel due to menopause?

- Irregular periods
- Hot flashes
- Disturbance in sleep
- Weight gain
- Hair loss
- Vaginal dryness
- Mood swings
- Changes in the skin like dry, patchy skin

## What can be done to get over these problems?

There are usually no medicines prescribed for cure for these symptoms and problems. A few lifestyle changes can help the women feel better and most symptoms improve with time.

### Balanced diet

Maintaining a balance in your daily diet is very important during/after menopause. Include at least five food groups in the day's diet and eat more fiber-rich food. It is better to minimize processed and canned food.

### Calcium supplementation

After menopause, your bones become weak due to a lack of estrogen, and the body needs more calcium, which in some cases one does not get enough calcium from regular diet. Calcium tablets can be taken with the advice of a doctor.

### Regular exercise

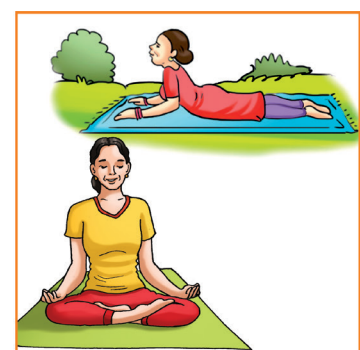
You may gain weight if you do not exercise during/after menopause. It is prescribed that one does light exercise or walks regularly for at least 30-40 minutes a day. This has a beneficial effect on your bones, muscles and joints.



Have a balanced diet



Take calcium rich food and tablets if advised



Exercise regularly



At the end the facilitator should make sure that all group members understand that menstruation is a normal process, girls should be informed of this timely so that they do not face any embarrassment, this should not be a taboo topic in the household and men of the household are also aware of the normalcy around this.

Moreover, men of the family should be sensitive and share the woman's household chores to give her some rest during menstruation.

## ■ ■ ■ Role of Self Help Group

- ▶ The group should build awareness among older boys, men and others in the community to address prevalent taboos and myths around menstruation.
- ▶ The group should ensure that all women and adolescent girls in their families use sanitary pads during menstruation and there is proper disposal of the used pads/ cloth after use.
- ▶ Members of the group should also be able to identify if there is a need to meet the ASHA, ANM or a doctor for issues related to menstruation.
- ▶ SHGs should take lead in ensuring that pits, incinerators are installed for proper disposal of sanitary pads.
- ▶ Production and distribution of sanitary pads can be taken up as an enterprise by SHGs/Vos.

**Note:** The self-help group should be ready to support those members who face problems or find it difficult to convey these messages and convince their families..

**Session concludes:** End the session by revisiting the questions from the case study and their answers. Thank the participants and close.



The Food, Nutrition, Health and WASH (FNHW) Toolkit has been developed by the National Mission Management Unit (NMMU) with support from Technical Assistance agencies–TA- NRLM (PCI) and inputs from ROSHNI–Centre of Women Collectives led Social Action, National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), State Institutes of Rural Development (SIRDs), National Resource Persons (NRPs), State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs) of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra, JEEViKA Technical Support Program–Project Concern International (JTSP-PCI) and UNICEF state teams from Odisha, Bihar and Chhattisgarh.

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