

# Your Period. Your World.

a menstrual health and  
equity guide for youth

## + PLANET-POSITIVE PERIODS

Menstrual equity meets  
sustainability

## + GENDER INCLUSION

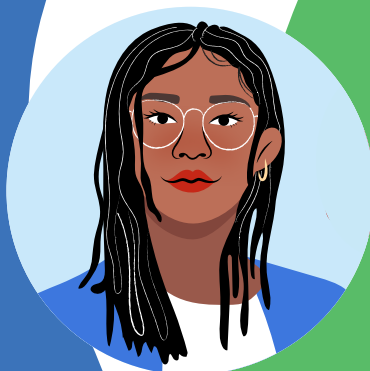
Beyond the binary

## + REUSABLE PRODUCT GUIDE

Everything you need to know about  
pads, cups and period underwear

## + KNOW YOUR BODY

Cycle tracking tips



**aisle**  
periodaisle.com



## Introduction

Whether you are a youth, parent, educator or champion of reproductive health, this booklet is an essential resource to help you better understand what it's like to have a period in the 21st century.

How we see periods and the menstrual cycle is central to sexual and reproductive health and rights, as it touches so many critical issues, from the environment to social and economic justice to gender inclusion.

Until now, the period conversation has been mainly centered around disposable pads and tampons as the only product options, with girls and women as their assumed users. Fortunately, this is changing, and this booklet is a wonderful example.

I hope that youth with periods who read this will feel heard and included and that it will support a more positive experience of their cycles. I also hope that they become open to the idea of choosing reusable products, and will join forces with us to help dismantle period poverty, stigma and shame.

As someone who has been teaching about menstrual health for 24 years, I am proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with ally companies like Aisle, who have been championing inclusive and sustainable periods since 1993. Their vision of creating a new, friendlier and more sustainable “period aisle” for all people with periods is one I stand behind wholeheartedly: I’ll see you there!

**Saleema Noon, BA, MA, OBC**  
**Principal, Saleema Noon Sexual Health Educators**



# Table of Contents

The Menstrual Cycle ..... 4

Reusable Period Products ..... 6

Reusables FAQ ..... 9

PMS ..... 10

Getting Support ..... 12

Cycle Tracking ..... 15

Inclusive Periods ..... 16

Planet-Positive Periods ..... 18

Sustainable Period Makeovers ..... 20

Period Poverty ..... 22

Menstrual Equity and Taking Action ..... 23

**Aisle (previously known as Lunapads)** was one of the very first companies in the world to create modern reusable menstrual products. We've been smashing period shame since 1993!

Certified



Corporation

This company meets the highest standards of social and environmental impact

Written by Madeleine Shaw.  
Planet-Positive Periods content by Madeleine Shaw, Damaris Pereda, Zeal Desai and Noelle McPhail. Please share any feedback or questions you may have about Your Period. Your World. with [hello@periodaisle.com](mailto:hello@periodaisle.com).

**Aisle** is located on the unceded, ancestral lands of the xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Watuth), Stó:lō, and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nations of the Coast Salish peoples.



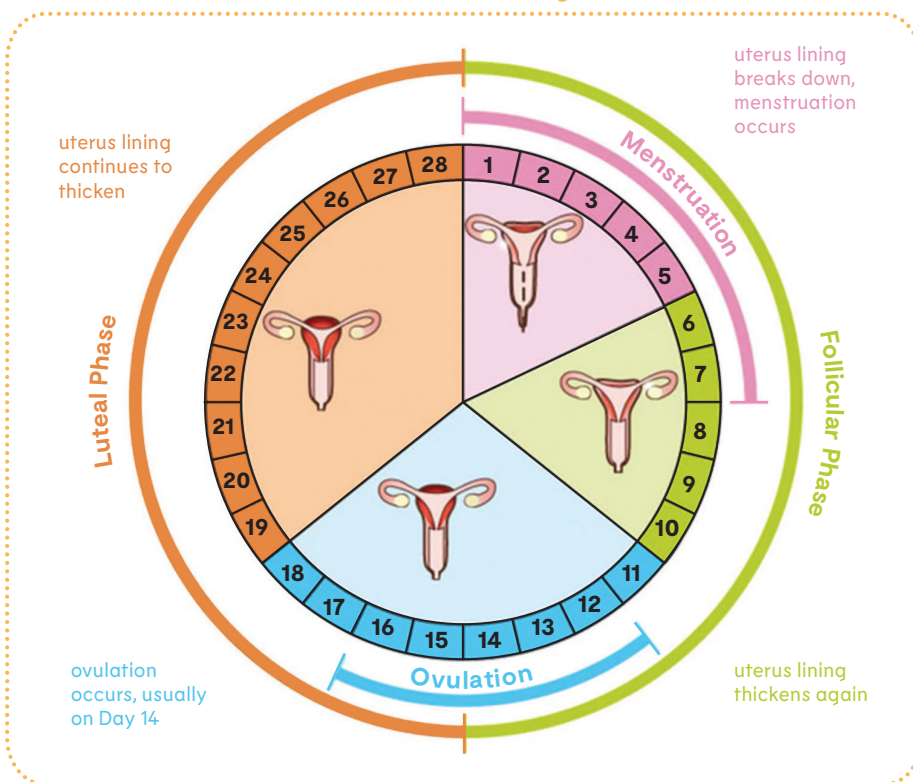
## The Menstrual Cycle

Puberty is a time of immense change.

Between the ages of 9 and 18 (the timing is different for everyone), the brain begins to send out signals to different parts of the body, carrying an important announcement: it's time to mature! Menarche (the technical name for starting your first period) is the signal that your menstrual cycle has started and that your body is working towards being capable of getting pregnant (although we recognize that this may not be everyone's path).

Generally, the menstrual cycle plays out like this: every 28 days (this can vary widely), an egg from one of the ovaries is released and travels down one of the fallopian tubes. This is known as ovulation. Watery, egg-whitish vaginal fluid is a classic indicator of ovulation.

### The Menstrual Cycle





Every month, the uterus prepares a rich spongy lining to nourish an egg that travels down from the ovaries to the uterus. If the egg doesn't meet up with a sperm (this is called fertilization), it continues down the fallopian tube and dissolves. If the thick lining of nutrients isn't needed to support a fertilized egg, the lining sheds out of the vagina; this is called a period.

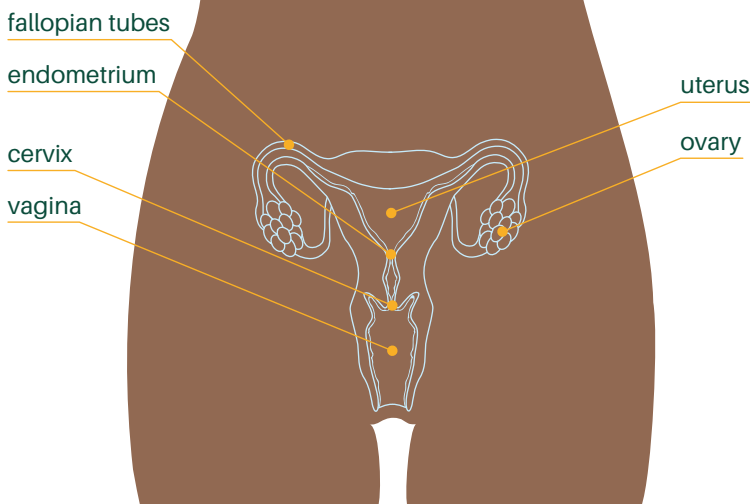
The first full day of bleeding is day 1 of the menstrual cycle. This cycle can range from around 21-36 days or longer, and repeats itself until menopause. Menopause, the time when your periods stop permanently, usually occurs between the ages of 45 to 55.

Although we think of menstrual flow (or menses) as being made up of blood, it is actually only about 35% blood. The rest of it is uterine lining, water, endometrial cells, and other natural vaginal and cervical secretions, so it can look like small globs, rather than simply liquid.

### How much will I bleed?

It may seem and feel like a lot of blood, but on average a period produces around 6-12 teaspoons (30-60ml) of menses (menstrual blood). This is about the same amount as a travel-size bottle of shampoo. The color of menses can vary greatly. It can be deep red, pale pink, brown and or even blackish. The amount, colour, and consistency can vary from cycle to cycle and day to day.

### Where Periods Come From



## Reusable Period Products



You are likely already familiar with disposable pads and tampons, but did you know that there are reusable menstrual products too? You can think of reusable menstrual products as similar choices to using a reusable water bottle or cloth shopping bag instead of using and throwing away plastic single-use items. In addition to being more sustainable, reusable menstrual products are also more comfortable!



### Pads & Liners

Reusable pads and liners are a great choice for someone who is just starting their period, while sleeping/overnight, or if the idea of having something inside of you does not appeal to you.

- Come in a variety of sizes and styles to suit lighter and heavier flows
- Should be changed every 2-6 hours (or whenever the pad feels wet/heavy)
- Are worn externally in the gusset on your underwear
- Are made from fabric
- Have wings that wrap around your underwear to keep them in place
- Are washed, dried, and reused
- Have a higher upfront cost, but are cheaper in the long run because you don't have to keep buying them!



## Period Underwear

Period underwear are like regular underwear, but have an absorbent lining in the gusset (crotch) that absorbs menstrual flow, allowing you to wear them without additional products. They come in lots of different styles to suit your personal preference (even boxer briefs!).

## Washing cloth pads and liners and period underwear

- Before adding to your regular laundry, thoroughly rinse pads, liners or the gusset of period underwear in cold running water until it runs clear. Doing this ensures that most of the menses will already be out of the products by the time you add them to your regular laundry. There is no need to worry about your pads, liners or period underwear staining other garments that they are washed with.
- Machine wash with your regular detergent in cold water. Avoid bleach, fabric softener & scent boosters - they'll decrease the performance and lifespan of the products. Products can also be hand washed with regular detergent.
- As with other garments, wash your pads, liners and period underwear with like colors.
- Hang to dry if possible - it saves energy & prolongs the life of the products! Otherwise, machine-dry on low.

## Menstrual health tips:

- Always clean your hands before changing your period products
- Change your period products regularly
- Use and clean your period products as instructed



## Menstrual Cups

Menstrual cups are reusable and are worn internally to catch menstrual flow. The Aisle cup is made from 100% medical grade silicone.

While they can be somewhat challenging initially to learn how to insert, remove and clean, they require less frequent changes than tampons, and are great for using while playing sports or working out. The Aisle cup can be safely left in for 12 hours, but you may need to empty it more frequently on heavier flow days.

## How to clean a Menstrual Cup

Clean your menstrual cup with warm water and a mild, unscented, oil-free soap. The tiny holes located below the rim must be kept clear and clean at all times. Gently stretch each hole under warm running water to remove any debris. At the end of your cycle, thoroughly wash, rinse and dry the cup completely. Store it in the cotton bag provided, not in a plastic bag or airtight container.

**The Aisle cup** can hold up to 30 ml (1 ounce) of fluid. By comparison, an average regular-sized tampon holds about 5 ml (.16 oz.) of menstrual flow.

## How to use a menstrual cup

Be sure to carefully read the detailed instructions included with each cup prior to using.



**wash hands**



**fold**



**insert**



**feel comfortable**



**remove**



**clean as directed**



## Reusables FAQ

### Q) Are reusables safe to use?

The marketing and language of disposable 'hygiene' and 'sanitary' products implies that reusable products may not be safe from a health perspective. However, quality reusable products have been tested for safety and are also reviewed by federal health agencies. When used and cleaned as directed, reusable products are completely generally safe.



### Q) Are reusables and period blood gross?

No. We have all been strongly socially conditioned to see menstrual blood as gross or dirty. As we know, this is completely false and this type of shaming narrative needs to stop. We also need to break the silence regarding menstruation. Many reusables users actually find that sharing about their periods and being closer to their menses can be liberating and a great way to learn more about their cycles. In fact, period blood has no odor and acts as raw material for reproduction - it's basically what we're made of!

### Q) Do they actually work?

Yes! Assuming that you are using a well-made product, users typically find reusables more comfortable and just as if not more effective than disposables.

### Q) Menstrual cups look a bit scary to me. Are they comfortable?

Menstrual cups can involve a bit of a learning curve, however most people love them and particularly enjoy not having to change them as often as tampons. When inserted correctly, they are not painful and in fact it can be easy to forget that they are even there.

### Q) How do I manage reusables when I'm outside the home?

A waterproof bag is a common solution for transporting fresh and used pads and underwear. Menstrual cups can be cleaned in public bathrooms by bringing a wet paper towel into the stall with you, emptying the product into the toilet, cleaning it with the paper towel, and then re-inserting it.



## PMS

As a result of the hormonal shifts leading up to (and during) periods, it is not uncommon to experience premenstrual syndrome (PMS). Different levels of hormones can change how we feel and experience the world. Two very important hormones in the menstrual cycle are estrogen and progesterone.

As an egg in the ovary prepares to be released by the uterus (ovulation), estrogen levels rise, communicating to the uterus that it's time to get ready for the egg. When estrogen levels in the body go up during the follicular phase, some people feel more positive, focused, or creative.

**As estrogen levels start to descend in the luteal phase, mood changes can include increased:**

- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Sadness





### Physical changes can include:

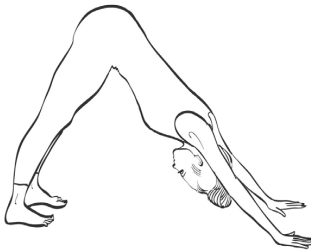
- Cramping (often in the lower abdomen, back, or thighs)
- Changes in appetite
- Bloating
- Breast tenderness

Cramps, while not fun, do have a purpose: the muscles surrounding the uterus contract to help menses travel down the cervical canal and out the vaginal opening. Taking an over-the-counter pain medication (Ibuprofen is commonly recommended for menstrual cramps), applying heat, and stretching can help manage cramps.

For some, exercise improves cramps, for others, relaxation is key — whatever works for you is the right answer.

At Aisle, we love the cat-cow and downward dog stretching poses to soothe period pains! Note that cat and cow can be performed from a seated position as well.

Down Dog



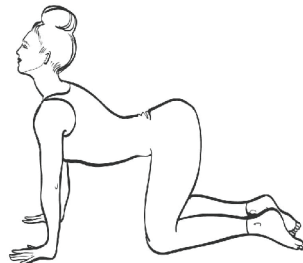
Child's Pose



Cow Pose



Cat Pose





## Getting Support

Menstruation is a totally normal bodily function. That said, as discussed in the last section, menstrual discomfort is of course very real for many of us.

Everyone deserves support and to have their experiences taken seriously. Start with friends or trusted adults. Sharing your experience with or asking for support from others can also form positive bonds and dismantle shame.

It's also important to know that sometimes during your period you may experience abnormal symptoms that should be checked out.

### Check in with a healthcare professional if you experience the following:

- Dizziness
- Weakness
- Tiredness
- Heart palpitations

These symptoms could be a sign of iron deficiency or Anemia. Anemia is common for individuals who have heavy periods.





### If you regularly experience:

- Bleeding for longer than a week
- Blood clots larger than a \$0.25 cent coin
- Needing to change out period products every 1-2 hours for consecutive hours

These symptoms can be a sign of Menorrhagia (very heavy bleeding). A medical professional will work to determine the causes, and create a support plan for you.



### If you experience very heavy periods (see above) and/or...

- Cramping and pelvic pain throughout the month
- Painful urination or bowel movements
- Intense PMS symptoms
- Irregular periods

These symptoms can signal endometriosis. Due to a lack of training in recognizing the signs of endometriosis, this hormonal and immune system condition often goes undiagnosed. Luckily, with proper medical support, endometriosis can often be effectively managed.



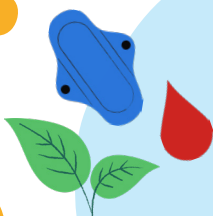
## Period Positivity

Periods can be challenging and overwhelming for many reasons. Taboos are actions, words or subjects that are socially unacceptable to talk about or acknowledge: making periods taboo hurts everyone, not just people who menstruate. Stigma is a strong feeling of embarrassment or shame that someone experiences from society or something about themselves. Stigma is cultural, meaning it doesn't come from one person, but from all of us as a group.

Challenging negative attitudes without erasing individual experience is something that we can all do to normalize diverse experiences and heal period shame. The truth is, we all have someone's period to thank for being here right now!

A big part of smashing period shame is simply calling menstruation what it is and speaking openly and honestly about our experience, as well as validating those who have different experiences. When we use terms like 'being on the rag' or 'the curse', it generalizes negative connotations, whereas just saying *periods or menstruation* and then adding your personal truth leaves room for a diversity of perspectives without judgement.

**Many Indigenous cultures** around the world view menarche and periods as sacred and worthy of ritual celebrations. While you may not necessarily feel drawn to celebrating your period, it's worth doing some research and being more culturally aware.



## Cycle Tracking

There are lots of different ways to track your cycle: it can be as simple as making a few notes on a calendar or in your diary. After using a tracking tool for a few cycles, you may be able to predict when your period will arrive (super helpful!), or better understand your changing energy levels and moods.

However you track, make sure to mark every day of bleeding and then the number of days from day 1 (the first full day of bleeding) to your next period. This will help you learn the average length of your cycle.

Try to take note of:

### Your flow

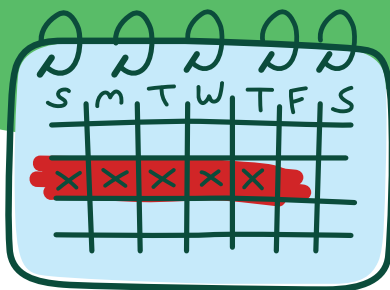
- Is it moderate? Heavy? Light?
- What consistency and colour is it?



### Your experience

- Do you have any symptoms like cramps, headache or fatigue?
- How do you feel emotionally and what are your energy levels?

It's fun and easy to track on paper or manually: search for some templates online, make your own, or use a calendar.



# MENSTRUAL CYCLE

## Inclusive Periods

Assuming that only cis-gender girls and women menstruate is an inaccurate, socially exclusive idea based on the outdated notion of binary gender (binary gender assumes only two possible genders).

- Not all people who identify as women and girls experience periods, and not everybody who identifies as female menstruates.
- Some transgender men also menstruate.
- Some women, including transgender women, don't menstruate because they were born without a uterus. Others might not menstruate due to stress, age, medications, or health conditions.

Using gender neutral language to discuss puberty and periods can help transgender and gender nonconforming individuals feel safer and more comfortable. It's an easy and important way to acknowledge that everyone's experiences are valuable and also helps to fight menstrual shame and taboos.

When we incorrectly tie having a period to "womanhood" it makes it harder for trans people to access health care services and education about their bodies. This kind of exclusion and erasure can contribute to symptoms of gender dysphoria.

### Cisgender:

People who identify with the sex they were assigned at birth.

### Transgender:

People who do not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. A transgender man was assigned female at birth. Conversely, a transgender woman was assigned male at birth.

### Non-binary or gender-fluid:

People who do not identify with being consistently male or female.





## Gender Dysphoria:

When someone experiences anxiety, distress, or discomfort because the sex they were assigned at birth, (or/and the expectations that come with that assigned sex) don't fit their gender identity. For example, having to shop for period products in the "feminine hygiene" aisle can be alienating for people who don't identify as "feminine".



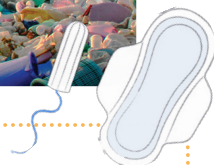
### Some ways to talk about periods that aren't gendered:

INSTEAD OF...	USE THIS
Becoming a woman	Going through puberty
Menstruating women and girls	People who menstruate/have periods
Womens health	Reproductive health
Feminine hygiene products	Period or menstrual products

## Planet-Positive Periods

*Content courtesy of Planet-Positive Periods, a suite of educational materials, research and communications tools created by Aisle, PERIOD. and Green Periods.*

- On average, periods occur for about 40 years in individuals' lives
- When you add up all those periods back-to-back, that's about 6.5 years spent menstruating in someone's lifetime
- Hundreds of millions of people with periods around the world use some type of menstrual product, so the products they use have an individual and a collective impact.



### Facts about disposable menstrual products:

- Disposable pads can contain up to 90% plastic and tampons can contain up to 6% plastic, not including applicators - plus, most pads and tampons come individually wrapped in plastic
- Making the plastic for disposables burns large amounts of fossil fuels, producing gases that pollute the air and contribute to climate change
- Once thrown away, the plastic in tampons and pads can take up to 1000 years to break down, resulting in smaller pieces called "microplastics"
  - Microplastics harm the environment and are dangerous to birds and other animals
- Most disposables end up in landfills, which generate greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change
- Billions of disposables also end up in oceans every year because they're wrongly flushed down the toilet



### **“Eco-Friendly” disposable products?**

- “Greenwashing” is when consumers are led to believe that products or practices are more environmentally friendly than they actually are
- Some disposable products are marketed as “eco-friendly”, using words like “organic,” “biodegradable,” “compostable,” “non-toxic,” “chlorine-free,” or “plant-based” - but it’s not actually clear if these products are any better for the environment than mainstream disposables
  - Making just one disposable cotton pad can take up to 6 gallons (23 liters) of irrigation water
  - Though some of these products can decompose faster than traditional disposables, they’re often thrown away in plastic bags and can’t readily decompose in a landfill environment
  - “Eco-friendly” disposables are also the most expensive disposable option, and monthly recurring costs can really add up over 40 years of menstruating



#### **Sustainable Menstruation:**

When periods are managed in an eco-friendly, budget-friendly, safe and accessible way over the long run



#### **Menstrual Footprint:**

The amount of waste a person or group generates and money they spend using menstrual products



## Sustainable Period Makeovers

Here are some examples about how it can look and feel to switch from disposables to reusables. These profiles are inspired by actual Aisle customers.

*All charts courtesy of Green Periods.*



Cade, 18, they/he

### Lifestyle:

Senior/Grade 12,  
into music &  
roller derby

**Products used before:**  
Organic Pads and Liners

**Reusable products they use now:**  
Boxer brief-style period underwear



Zeba, 20, she/her

### Lifestyle:

College Sophomore/  
University 2nd year,  
PERIOD. chapter leader

**Products used before:**  
Pads and Liners

**Reusable products they use now:**  
Cloth pads and period underwear



Julie, 35, she/her

### Lifestyle:

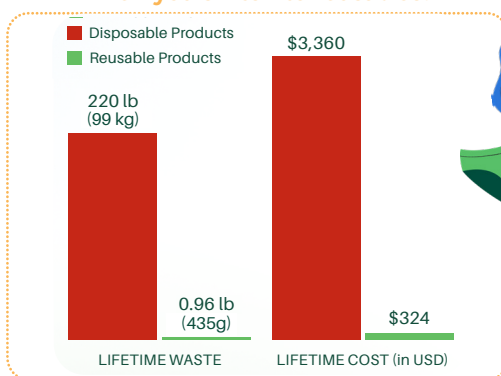
Graphic designer,  
has a 2-year-old child,  
enjoys yoga

**Products used before:**  
Tampons

**Reusable products they use now:**  
Menstrual cup and reusable liner



## How much money and waste are saved when you switch to reusables?



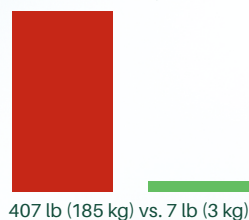
### What it was like to switch:

As a non-binary-identified person, periods can feel awkward, so this is easier and more private.

### What they like about reusables:

Period underwear are relatively hassle-free and don't remind them as much that they are bleeding as pads did. Boxer style affirms their gender. Appreciate not having to buy expensive menstrual products every month.

### Estimated lifetime waste before switching vs. after



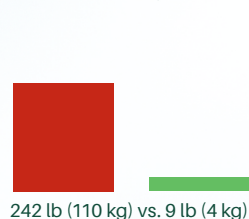
### What it was like to switch:

Was surprised by how much more comfortable and absorbent cloth pads are. Washing them in the dorm has opened up some interesting conversations!

### What they like about reusables:

Often got rashes from disposable pads, which have now gone away. Prefers pads during the day and period underwear for overnight.

### Estimated lifetime waste before switching vs. after



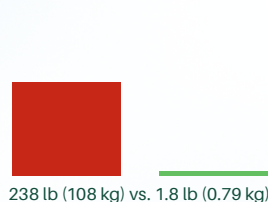
### What it was like to switch:

A bit of a different feeling to insert and remove, but basically do the same thing. A bit more work to clean the cup, but it's a big win to be able to wear it for so much longer than tampons.

### What they like about reusables:

Less drying than tampons. So comfortable that she sometimes forgets that she is on her period. Uses a reusable liner at night to feel extra secure.

### Estimated lifetime waste before switching vs. after



## Period Poverty

Period poverty is when someone can't afford or doesn't have access to safe period products and/or basic facilities like toilets or hand-washing stations. Period poverty also includes lack of access to education and/or a shame-free attitude about menstruation.

In a 2021 U.S. national survey of 1,000 menstruating teens, 1 in 4 struggled to afford period products and 4 in 5 either missed or knew someone who missed class time because they did not have access to period products. Period poverty — and poverty more broadly speaking — is a human rights issue. Lack of access to period products is also a public health issue, and is one of the major reasons why students regularly miss school around the world.

**Reusable products can be less accessible** to people with fewer financial resources. Eliminating period poverty is also about making a wider variety of products available to everyone so that everyone who needs products can make informed decisions about which solutions work best for their needs and bodies.



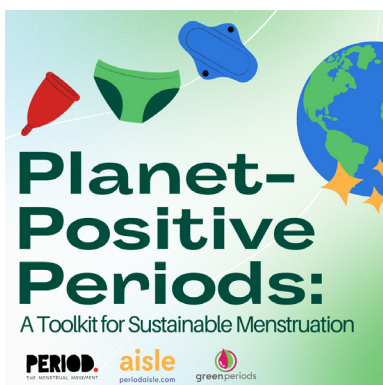
*Photo courtesy of PERIOD.*

## Menstrual Equity

Menstrual equity is the affordability, accessibility and safety of menstrual products for all people, supported by laws and policies that acknowledge and consider menstruation. Period poverty is not simply eradicated by providing menstrual supplies. We must all work to tackle systemic gender injustice at its root, by advocating for education, healthcare, youth leadership, and systemic policy change to make period products more affordable and accessible for all.

## Ways to take action now!

- Check out the work of menstrual equity activist groups like [period.org](http://period.org), [hashtaghappyperiod.org](http://hashtaghappyperiod.org), [periodpromise.ca](http://periodpromise.ca), [theperiodpurse.com](http://theperiodpurse.com) and many more
- Attend a meeting, volunteer, write to your local government representatives to ask them to take action, donate if you are able to or organize a product donation drive
- Download **The Planet-Positive Periods Toolkit**, review its contents to educate yourself, and then organize a presentation wherever you live, work or study
- Ask leaders in your school or workplace to provide free menstrual product options. If disposable products are being offered in bathrooms, request access to free reusable products as well



### The Planet-Positive Periods Toolkit



↑ Scan me! ↑

Your Period. Your World. is brought to you by:

# aisle

→ [periodaisle.com](https://periodaisle.com)

→ [@periodaisle](https://twitter.com/periodaisle)

**Aisle (formerly Lunapads)** was one of the first companies in the world to popularize reusable menstrual products. Since 1993 we have been proudly dedicated to creating a world-class collection of menstrual cups, period underwear and cloth pads. As a certified B Corp for over a decade, Aisle upholds the highest standards of social and environmental impact in its operations. See you in the **\*new\*** period aisle!

With support from our awesome  
Planet-Positive Periods partners:

**PERIOD.**  
THE MENSTRUAL MOVEMENT

→ [period.org](https://period.org)

→ [@periodmovement](https://twitter.com/periodmovement)

**PERIOD.**'s network of over 400 local PERIOD. chapters and hundreds of nonprofit service partners work together to end period poverty and period stigma through service, education and advocacy. Join us and help solve period poverty in our lifetime!



**greenperiods**

→ [greenperiods.org](https://greenperiods.org)

→ [@greenperiodsorg](https://twitter.com/greenperiodsorg)

**Green Periods** is creating awareness about sustainable menstruation, an eco-friendly, safe, accessible and budget-friendly way to manage periods using reusable products over the long run. Since sustainable menstruation tackles climate change, period poverty, stigma, and menstrual health, everyone -- especially youth -- must be able to make informed choices and advocate for sustainable practices all over the world.