

Breaking the bloody taboo

A little story about menstruation

The first menstruation is a life-changing experience for most girls. Many girls (and boys!) aren't aware of what actually happens in a woman's body and how to deal with the bleeding and possible pain. And after birth, adult women sometimes face some unexpected changes. But what does really happen during menstruation and how does it change after birth?

The first menstruation



What is menstruation? How much blood do I lose? Does it hurt? Many young girls are troubled by all these questions. Like many things in life, you cannot plan your first menstruation. Normally, it starts with vaginal discharge. Once the bleeding begins, the female's uterine lining is shed together with the unfertilized egg. Afterwards, an egg in one of the ovaries starts to mature while the lining of the uterus grows and thickens again,

ready to nourish a baby. If fertilization doesn't take place, a new cycle begins due to the interaction between body and hormones and menstruation starts again. This process recurs around 500 times in a woman's life!

Menstruation after childbirth

Not only the first menstruation but also the birth of a child is usually an exciting experience, which brings many changes. Sometimes it can take up to a year before the first menstrual bleeding sets in again. The exact time depends on how quickly a woman recovers from childbirth, how long a child is breastfed and some other factors. The normal cycle often returns after a woman stops breastfeeding. A woman who does not breastfeed at all, might already menstruate after five to twelve weeks after giving birth.

By the way, women can become pregnant again before their first menstruation since ovulation takes place before the bleeding. Therefore, breastfeeding or the fact that menstruation hasn't started again is not a safe contraceptive.

Once it's back, bleeding can be heavier and last longer during the first few months. Especially the first menstrual bleeding can be painful, heavy and prolonged. It often takes a few months for the natural rhythm to be restored. However, it's completely normal if the menstrual bleeding changes postpartum and differs in length, intensity and pain.

Breaking the bloody taboo

But why are many girls and women unsure and uninformed about the female menstrual bleeding? Although sexuality and many related topics seem to be omnipresent, menstruation is often kept a secret. As a result, there are still massive gaps in knowledge, especially among young people, even though we live in an enlightened society.

The social business "erdbeerwoche" (strawberry week) is an awareness raising platform for menstruation and sustainable hygiene products and has dedicated itself

to the menstrual taboo over the past seven years attempting to break it while revolutionizing the female hygiene sector. A survey on knowledge and attitude regarding menstruation was conducted by "erdbeerwoche" among 1,100 adolescents in April 2017 and revealed shocking results:

60% of girls claim to have a negative attitude towards menstruation. Most associate the terms "annoying" and "painful", but also positive terms like "female", with it. 70% of boys find menstruation unimportant and embarrassing. While 50% of girls are not familiar with terms like menstrual cycle or cycle length, 80% of boys have no idea.

These facts led "erdbeerwoche" to launch a large-scale educational project for schools in 2017 and develop an innovative digital learning platform called READY FOR RED with the goal of helping teachers to provide teenagers with the necessary contents related to the menstrual cycle & Co.

Effects of tampons and pads



Many young and also older women are unaware of the environmental impact of female hygiene products. On average, a menstruating woman uses between 10,000 and 17,000 tampons or pads during her lifetime. 90% of all conventional hygiene products consist of a cellulose-plastic mixture which takes up to 500 years to rot. Various studies have also found plasticizers or glyphosate in pads and panty liners, which can have a negative impact on women's health.

For this reason, "erdbeerwoche" informs women about the problem of conventional hygiene products and at the same time offers alternatives, for example, tampons and pads made of pure organic cotton or reusable menstrual cups that replace up to 2,000 tampons. After all, menstruating women use more than 45 billion hygiene products a year and have a great power as consumers which brings them great consumer potential.

That's why it's time for a new generation of female hygiene!

Elaboration and text: © erdbeerwoche, Katharina Salomon, 10.1.2018

Further information about erdbeerwoche: www.erdbeerwoche.com
Sustainable female hygiene: www.erdbeerwoche-shop.com
READY FOR RED: www.erdbeerwoche.com/schulprojekt