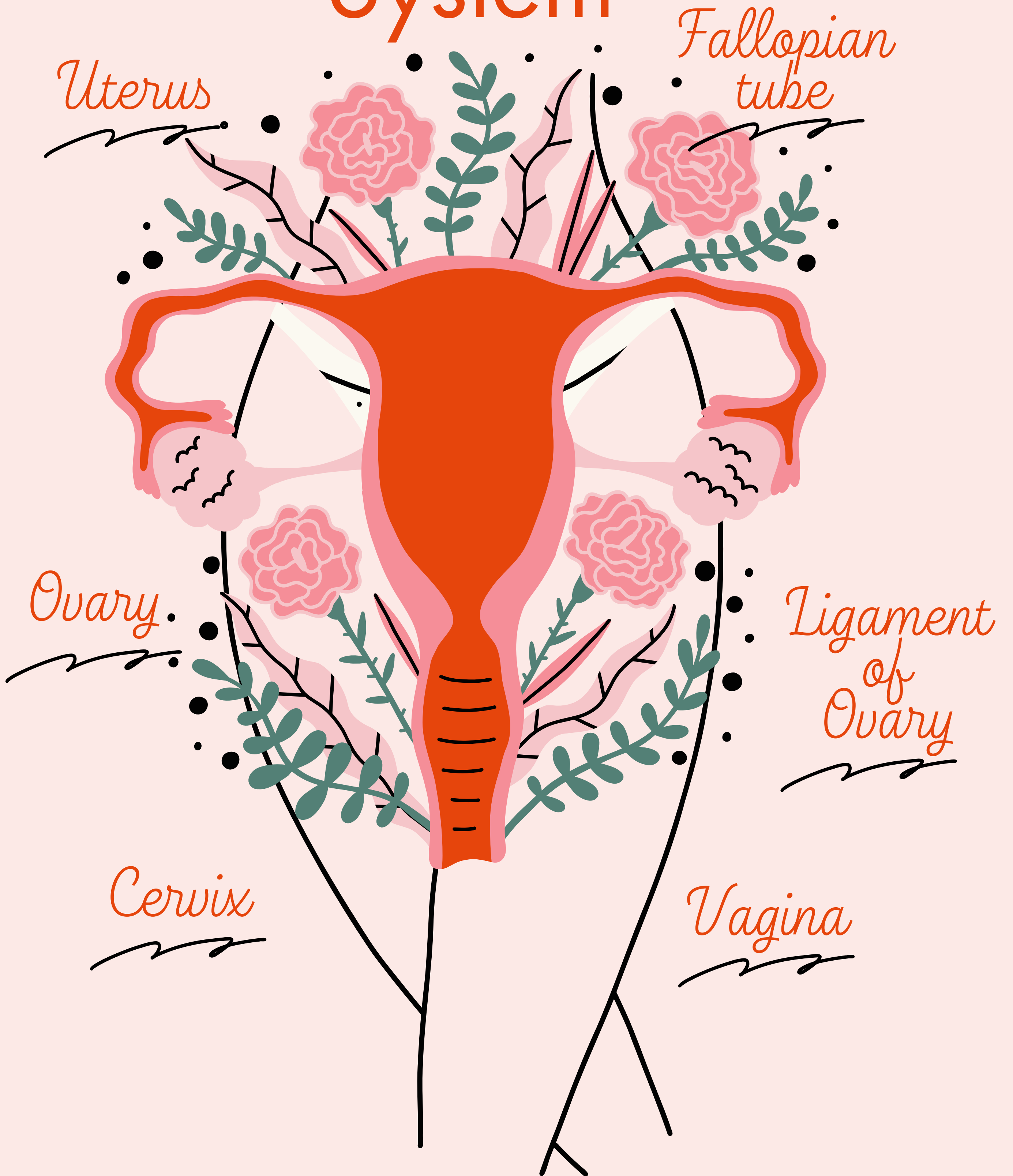


Female Reproductive System





Periods

Periods and how to discuss them with your GP or Healthcare provide

WHAT IS THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE?

Your menstrual cycle is the way your body prepares for a pregnancy
Your period is the part of this cycle when you experience bleeding.

The whole menstrual cycle lasts around 28 days

For a pregnancy to grow the womb (uterus) needs to have a thick soft lining.
If at the end of the cycle there is no pregnancy the womb lining needs to shed (come out) of the vagina ready to start the cycle again next month.

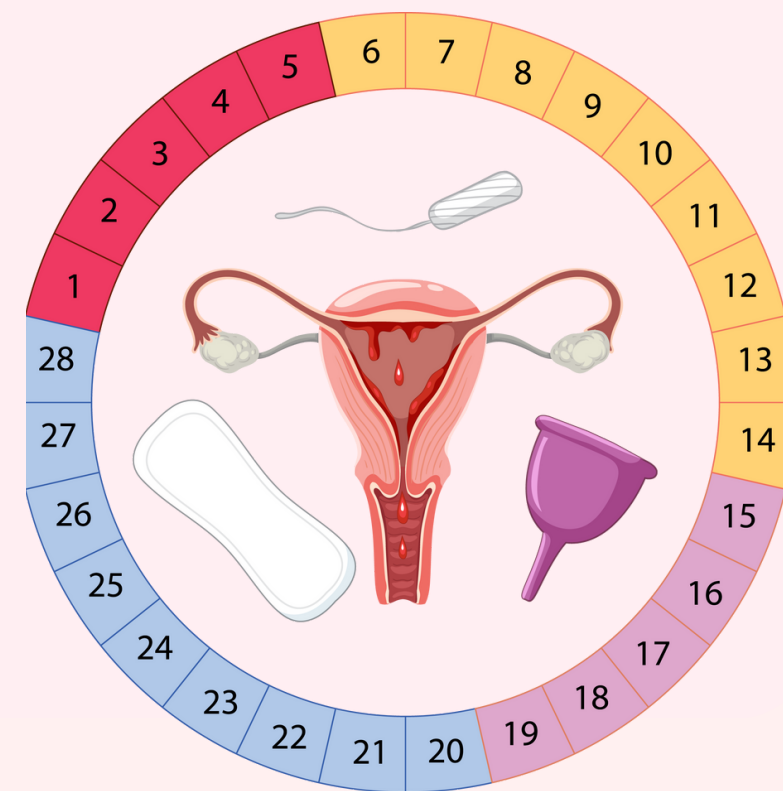
When this lining comes out that causes your period.

WHAT IS A 'NORMAL' PERIOD?

Most people have bleeding for 5 days but between 2 and 7 days is OK.

It is normal for bleeding not to come on exactly the same day each month, up to 5 days before or after your expected time is not something to worry about.

Mild cramping pain that can be eased with paracetamol or ibuprofen is also normal.



HOW MUCH BLEEDING SHOULD THERE BE ?

Although period blood can look and feel like a lot, for most people over their whole period the amount of blood lost is only the same as a couple of egg cups.

On your heaviest days it is normal to need to change your period protection every couple of hours and for your pad to be full when you get up in the morning.

You may be using high flow protection eg super tampons, heavy flow period pants or night time pads on your heavy days.



WHEN SHOULD I SEE MY GP?

HEAVY BLEEDING

If you are finding your period blood is coming through your period products eg having accidents at work or school (flooding). Especially if you are changing sanitary products every 1-2 hours and this is still happening.

If you are passing clots bigger than a 50p piece

Having to get up at night to change your protection or leaking through every morning

Needing to combine period products eg using towels and tampons together to prevent blood leakage



IRREGULAR BLEEDING

Bleeding after sex or in between your periods

Finding it hard to predict when your periods are coming



PAINFUL PERIODS

Finding paracetamol and ibuprofen aren't enough to control pain or cramps



MOOD CHANGES

Avoiding things you would normally do just before or during your period because you feel so low, anxious or other changes to your mental health



SIGNS OF ANEMIA

Feeling dizzy or very tired and having heavy or long periods

What might your health professional ask?

- When was your last period, how long it lasts and when any heavy days are
- Do you have any of the signs of heavy, painful or irregular bleeding or mood changes described above?
- Are you using any contraception (products to stop you getting pregnant) such as pills, condoms etc?
- Are your smear tests up to date, would you like more information on this?
- Have you had any pregnancies or are you wanting to get pregnant?
- Do you feel you are at risk of sexually transmitted infections (STDs), would you like testing?
- Have you changed things in your life to cope with your periods eg time off work
- What is most bothering you with your periods and what do you hope to gain from your appointment?

WHAT ELSE MIGHT HAPPEN AT YOUR APPOINTMENT

- Not everyone needs to be examined but if it is recommended: You can ask for a chaperone or bring someone with you. You can ask for your appointment to be with a female.
- If your smear test is due they will encourage this is booked
- Blood tests may be arranged to check for low iron (anaemia) or other causes of period changes.
- Medication can usually be helpful. This may include tablets taken to reduce your bleeding, pain killers or contraception products.
- Referral for psychological support

Period problems are not always due to something that can be seen on a scan (ultrasound) so for most women this is not necessary but your GP can discuss this with you

Most women do not need a referral to a specialist (gynaecologist) as GPs are experienced in treating womens health but this will always be offered if needed.

Please remember periods should be a normal part of your life.

If this is not how your periods are for you please come and talk to your healthcare professional.

