

HER IMPACT INITIATIVE

Resource Guides for Women & Allies

Guides to inform, empower, and activate.

Inspired by a conversation with Parul Kamra, Communications Lead at Bala.

Menstrual Health 101 — What It Is, Why It's Stigmatized, and Why Talking About It Matters

Menstruation affects roughly half the world's population for a significant portion of their lives. Yet it remains one of the most hushed topics in homes, schools, and workplaces.

The Basics

Menstruation is the monthly shedding of the uterine lining that occurs when a pregnancy does not happen. It is a normal, healthy biological process. It typically:

- Begins between ages 9 and 16
- Occurs roughly every 21 to 35 days
- Lasts between 3 and 7 days
- Continues until menopause, typically in a person's late 40s to early 50s
- Can be accompanied by cramping, fatigue, mood changes, and other symptoms

Why It's Stigmatized

Across cultures, menstruation has been treated as dirty, shameful, or taboo. The effects of this stigma are serious:

- Girls miss school because they lack access to products or safe bathrooms
- Women delay seeking medical care for menstrual disorders out of embarrassment
- Conditions like endometriosis and PCOS go undiagnosed for years
- People suffer silently rather than asking for help or accommodation

“We never really talked about periods at home. It was always: don't tell your father, don't talk to any male member. Kind of suffer in silence.”

What Silence Costs

- **Education:** Girls in low-resource settings may drop out of school when they start menstruating due to lack of facilities or products
- **Health:** Shame prevents people from reporting symptoms that could indicate serious conditions
- **Workplace:** Without language to discuss it, people can't advocate for accommodations they need
- **Relationships:** Stigma creates distance between young people and the adults who could help them

Why Talking About It Changes Things

The normalization effect: When one person talks openly about their period, it signals to others that it is okay. That ripple matters.

Conversation is the first step toward better policy, better health outcomes, and better support systems. You don't have to share your own experience — you can simply stop treating someone else's as shameful.

Resources

- Bala (bala.org.in) — menstrual health education and advocacy in India
- PERIOD (period.org) — student-led nonprofit working on period poverty and stigma
- Bedsider (bedsider.org) — reproductive health information in accessible language
- Planned Parenthood (plannedparenthood.org) — menstrual health education

This resource guide was developed by the Her Impact Initiative. For more information or to share your story, contact us.