

Women's Resource Guide

Women's Reproductive Health

- **Menstruation**

- Information on menstrual health, hygiene, and related resources.

Section: Puberty and Periods (Menstruation)

Puberty

Puberty is the time when a child's body starts to change into an adult body. For girls, this usually happens between ages 8 and 13. During puberty, breasts grow, hair appears under the arms and near the vagina, and the body becomes taller and curvier.

Getting your period is a normal and healthy part of puberty. It usually happens about 2 years after breasts and pubic hair start growing. Starting your period means your uterus has begun its monthly cycle. You may feel excited, nervous, or have questions — all feelings are normal.

What is a period?

Some girls' bodies have a uterus, a small, pear-shaped organ inside the lower belly. The uterus is part of the reproductive system. It can help someone get pregnant and is also where your period comes from. Periods are also called **menstruation** or "that time of the month." Periods usually start between ages 10 and 16.

[Signs your child is about to start their first period.](#)

Why do periods happen?

Each month:

- The uterus builds a soft lining to get ready for a possible pregnancy.

- An egg is released from the ovary (this is called ovulation).
- If the egg is not fertilized, the lining is not needed.
- The lining leaves the body as blood. That's your period!

What to expect:

- Periods usually come about once a month and last **3–7 days**.
- The time from the first day of one period to the first day of the next is called a **cycle**. Most cycles are about 28 days, but anywhere from 21 to 35 days is still normal.
- Some people have a **heavy flow**, some have a **light flow**.
- When periods first start, they may be **irregular** (hard to predict). Keeping track of start and end days can help.
- A week before your period, you may notice acne, bloating, backaches, or mood changes.
- Cramps are also common. They happen because the uterus is a muscle, and it tightens and relaxes to release the lining.
- **Once your period starts, pregnancy is possible.**

Period products (ways to manage bleeding):

- **Pads:** absorb blood outside the body
- **Tampons:** absorb blood inside the vagina.
- **Menstrual cups:** soft reusable cups that collect blood inside.
- **Period underwear:** special underwear that absorbs blood and can be washed and reused.

Everyone has different preferences. Some use one product, some combine them. It's okay to try different ones until you find what feels right.

Tips for self-care:

- Change pads, tampons, or cups regularly to prevent infection and odor.
- Wash your hands before and after changing products.
- Keep an extra product in your bag in case your period comes unexpectedly.
- Track your cycle on a calendar or app to learn your pattern.

Important to remember:

- Periods are normal, healthy, and not gross.
- You can still do sports, school, work, and all daily activities while on your period.

- **Once periods begin, pregnancy is possible.** Talk with a trusted adult or doctor if you have questions about birth control (*link to section on family planning/birth control*).
- There is nothing to be embarrassed about — periods mean your body is working the way it should.
- **If your periods are very painful, very heavy, or stop coming, talk to a doctor.**

Explore Resources

Learn About Periods

- **Watch Videos** – The City of Boston has short videos about periods in many languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Arabic, French, Chinese, Russian, Somali, and Vietnamese.
<https://linktr.ee/menstrualequityseries>
- **Join a Workshop** – Love Your Menses runs free classes at the East Boston Library on the 2nd Tuesday of each month. <https://www.loveyourmenses.com/>
- **Track Your Period** – Use the *Flow App* to mark your days and learn more.
loveyourmenses.com/ourflow
- **Find Info Online** – Learn more about puberty and periods at [GirlsHealth.gov](https://www.GirlsHealth.gov) and [WomensHealth.gov](https://www.WomensHealth.gov).
- **Planned Parenthood** – Get clear information about periods and how to use pads, tampons, cups, and period underwear.
<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/>

Get Free Products

- **Chelsea City Hall** – Free menstrual products are available here.
- **Hope & Comfort** – Gives out pads and tampons across Massachusetts through local partners. [Hope & Comfort+1](#)

- **Dignity Matters** – Sends menstrual products to schools, shelters, and pantries, including in Greater Boston. [Dignity Matters+1](#)
- **Child Health Equity Center** – Shares free menstrual products and teaches about period care in Central Massachusetts. [Child Health Equity Center](#)

Local Support

- **La Colaborativa (Chelsea)** – Offers health programs and support for Latine women and families. [La Colaborativa](#)
- **Chelsea High School Health Center** – Free and private care for students, including help with periods, birth control, and more.
massgeneral.org/children/primary-care/school-based-health-center-chelsea-high-school

Learn and Advocate

- **Massachusetts Menstrual Equity Coalition** – A statewide group fighting period poverty. Offers a toolkit, a list of 400+ groups that help, and ways to get involved.
[MME Coalition+1](#)

- **Regular Gynecologic Care**

- Access to Pap smears, mammograms, and annual check-ups.
- Links to healthcare providers and facilities.

Section: Regular Gynecologic Care

Seeing a gynecologist (women's health doctor or nurse) is an important part of caring for your body. Even if you feel healthy, regular visits help you stay that way.

Why it matters

Gynecologist visits give you a safe, private space to:

- Talk about periods, birth control, pregnancy, or menopause (add links to other sections)
- Ask questions about your body
- Get checked for infections, cervical changes, or breast health

Remember: Regular check-ups can catch small problems early, before they become serious!

When to start:

- **Teens or early 20s:** It's a good idea to start even before your first Pap test
- **Age 21:** Begin Pap tests to check the cervix for changes or cancer
- **Every year:** Regular check-ups help you stay on track with preventive care

What to expect:

- Talk privately about your health and questions
- A physical or pelvic exam (if needed)
- Screenings like Pap or HPV tests
- Get advice about birth control, pregnancy planning, or menopause

Common issues your provider can help with

Gynecologists can check for and treat common problems, including:

- Yeast infections: itching, burning, or unusual discharge
- Urinary tract infections (UTIs): burning, frequent urination, or lower belly pain

Tip: These infections are common and treatable. Talk to your provider if you notice symptoms — you don't need to wait until your next visit.

Common tests and exams:

These are common tests, but everyone's body is different. Talk with your doctor about which tests you need and how often.

- **Pap test:** checks for cervical cancer (recommended starting at age 21)
- **HPV test:** looks for the virus that can cause cervical cancer.
- **Pelvic exam:** checks for infections or other issues with the uterus, ovaries, or vagina
- **[Screening for STIs](#)** (sexually transmitted infections) like chlamydia, gonorrhea, or HIV
- **Mammogram:** breast x-ray (usually starting at age 40, or earlier if family history)

Did you know? Breast and cervical cancer screenings are now covered by all types of insurance with no co-pay. <https://www.mass.gov/breast-and-cervical-cancer-screenings>

Tips for your visit:

- Write down your questions before your appointment
- Tell your provider about symptoms, even if they seem small
- Ask which tests are right for you
- Bring a trusted friend or adult if it helps you feel comfortable

Explore Care and Resources

Get Care Near You

- **Chelsea Community Health Center (MGH)** – Preventive care and referrals to women's doctors (OB/GYN). [massgeneral.org](https://www.massgeneral.org)

- **Women's Health at BIDMC–Chelsea** – Located at 1000 Broadway. Full women's clinic with Pap tests (cervical cancer test), birth control, and more. Spanish-speaking staff. bidmc.org
- **Mass General Brigham OB/GYN Providers (Chelsea)** – Women's health doctors at 151 Everett Ave. massgeneralbrigham.org
- **Planned Parenthood** – Check-ups, Pap smears (cervical cancer test), breast exams, and birth control. plannedparenthood.org

Free or Low-Cost Screenings

- **Massachusetts Breast and Cervical Cancer Program** – Free breast cancer tests (ages 40–64) and cervical cancer tests (ages 30–64) for women without insurance or with low insurance. Call: **877-414-4447**
- **See, Test & Treat Events (Cambridge Health Alliance)** – Free health fairs with Pap tests, HPV testing, breast exams, and mammograms.
Website: challiance.org
- **National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP)** – Free or low-cost breast and cervical cancer screening if you qualify.
cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp

- **Family Planning**

- Overview of contraceptive methods, counseling services, and clinics.
- Accessibility of family planning resources.

Section: Family Planning

Family planning helps you make choices about if and when you want to have children. It also helps you stay healthy and protect yourself from infections.

Why it matters

Family planning gives you control over your body and your future. Visiting a provider can help you:

- Learn about different birth control methods
- Help you pick the best method for your health and lifestyle
- Ask questions about pregnancy or how to prevent it
- Get tested and protected against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- Plan for a healthy pregnancy when you are ready

Contraceptive options

There are many safe and effective ways to prevent pregnancy. Your provider can help you choose what works best for you:

- **Birth control pills** – taken every day
- **Patch or ring** – placed on your skin or in your vagina, changed weekly or monthly
- **Shots** – given every 3 months
- **Intrauterine device (IUD)** – a small device placed in the uterus to prevent pregnancy. There are two main types: hormonal IUDs, which release hormones and last 3–8 years, and copper IUDs, which do not use hormones and can last up to 10 years. Both types are very effective at preventing pregnancy, but they do not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- **Condoms** – protect against pregnancy and STIs
- **Emergency contraception** – can prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex. It works best if you use it as soon as possible – within a few days of having

unprotected sex. It's sometimes called the "morning-after pill" and can be picked up "over-the-counter" at your pharmacy without seeing a doctor first, like Plan B One-Step.

Tip: Some people use more than one method at the same time for extra protection.

(DESIGN NOTE: mass.gov has this chart that could be used:

<https://picck.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Contraception-Birth-Control-Guide-English.pdf>

If you have an unintended pregnancy

If you think you might be pregnant and weren't planning it, you have options and support. **Talk to a trusted adult or healthcare provider** — they can explain your options and connect you with care.

Important to remember

- Family planning is about **your choices and your health**
- You can talk to a provider even if you aren't planning to get pregnant
- There are safe and effective options for everyone
- Abortion remains legal in Massachusetts. Find a trusted provider.
<https://reproequitynow.org/find-a-provider-massachusetts>

Did you know? In Massachusetts, many people are eligible to get up to a **12-month supply of prescription birth control at no cost** with just one trip to the pharmacy. This includes most types of birth control pills, patches, rings, and shots. [Learn more.](#)

Family Planning Resources

- **School-Based Health Center at Chelsea High School** – Free, confidential care for students, including birth control counseling, pregnancy testing, and reproductive health services. [Mass General Chelsea SBHC](#)
- **MGH Chelsea HealthCare Center** – Birth control counseling, pregnancy testing, and family planning for teens and adults. **Call 617-884-8300.** [Bedsider](#)
- **Beth Israel Deaconess HealthCare** – Chelsea (BIDHC) – Contraception counseling, well-woman exams, and prenatal care. Spanish-speaking services available. **Call 617-975-6100.** [Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center](#)

- **Cambridge Health Alliance (Everett)** – Free or low-cost reproductive health care if uninsured, underinsured, or need confidential services. Free condoms and lube available.
<https://www.challiance.org/services-programs/primary-care/sexual-and-reproductive-health>
- **Planned Parenthood** – Birth control, emergency contraception, STI testing, abortion care, and pre-pregnancy health. In-person and telehealth visits available. Call 800-258-4448. <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/>
- **Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) Family Planning Program** – Free or low-cost family planning services statewide. Available regardless of income or insurance. [Find Help](#)
- **Reproductive Equity Now – Find a Provider** – Directory of reproductive health providers across Massachusetts, including abortion care.
<https://reproequitynow.org/find-a-provider-massachusetts>

Sources: [mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov)

- **Safe Sex & STI Prevention**

- Information on STI prevention, testing locations, and safe sex practices.
- Clinics that provide education on sexual health.

Waiting on MGH to forward me information on Safe Sex/STI Prevention programs that they have available. During my research, I noticed there are little to no public workshops/classes/programs available for this category: most locations offering these classes/programs require you to be a member of some sort or a patient. We should look into how to make these things more public - XP 8/14/25

- **Pregnancy & Postpartum Care**

- Information on pregnancy resources, prenatal care, and postpartum support.
- Birth centers, OB/GYN care, and mental health support post-birth.

Maternal Health Programs through MassHealth

New webpage [Mass.gov/perinatalproviders](https://www.mass.gov/perinatalproviders)

MassHealth has published a new webpage for providers caring for pregnant and postpartum MassHealth members, such as OB/GYNs, midwives, primary care providers, pediatricians, and others. It includes detailed information and resources across several topics:

- Eligibility and covered services
- Managed care information and supports
- MassHealth doula benefit
- Behavioral health
- Breast pumps and lactation support
- Family planning

- Prenatal screening/diagnosis and vaccines
- Social determinants of health (SDOH)
- Patient-facing materials

NAMI Massachusetts – Perinatal & Postpartum Resources

Offers connections to support groups, home visiting programs, perinatal crisis support, and the National Maternal Mental Health Hotline.

[NAMI Massachusetts](#)

Massachusetts PMAD Initiative

Focused on perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs)—includes screening tools, provider training, and accessible resources.

[Mass.gov+1](#)

Postpartum Support International (PSI) – Massachusetts Chapter

Promotes awareness, prevention, and treatment of maternal mental health issues, and connects individuals to local support networks and professionals.

[Postpartum Support Int. Chapter Program](#)

UMass Lifeline for Moms

Provides mental health resources for pregnancy and postpartum phases including self-care guides, warning signs, and support contacts.

[UMass Chan Medical School](#)

National Maternal Mental Health Hotline (HRSA)

Free, confidential 24/7 hotline available in English and Spanish, offering emotional support and referrals during pregnancy and postpartum.

[MCHB](#)

MGH Ammon–Pinizzotto Center for Women’s Mental Health

Offers research-backed resources on perinatal psychiatric disorders, mental health medications during pregnancy, and support for postpartum mental health challenges.

[MGH Women's Mental Health Center](#)

Postpartum Support International (PSI)

Offers a national helpline, online support, and mental health resources for those experiencing postpartum mood disorders.

[Postpartum Support International \(PSI\)](#)

- **Breastfeeding Support**

- Breastfeeding Resources
- Support groups for breastfeeding mothers, including local and online resources.

Nurture by Naps Breastfeeding Support Group:

<https://www.nurturebynaps.com/free-breastfeeding-support-group>

Chelsea/Revere WIC Program

Offers breastfeeding support including certified lactation counselors (CLC), peer counselors, breast pump rentals, and educational resources. Services available in both English and Spanish.

[Website](#) | Phone: (617) 884-8300

Mass General Hospital – Chelsea Community Health Center

Provides free breastfeeding education classes, nutrition and lactation counseling, and referrals to additional community resources.

[Website](#) | Phone: (617) 884-8300

Breastfeeding Support Group – Chelsea

Peer-led support group near Chelsea, facilitated by lactation consultants. Offers guidance and a supportive environment for new mothers.

[Instagram Page](#)

La Leche League International (LLL)

Provides mother-to-mother support, virtual and in-person meetings, educational resources, and a directory to find local groups.

[Website](#) | Phone: (800) 525-3243

Boston Breastfeeding Coalition

Offers virtual and in-person support groups, professional lactation counseling, and resources for families.

[Website](#) | Warmline: (857) 301-8259

UMass Memorial Medical Center – Lactation Support & Baby Café

Offers phone support (508-334-6455), WIC peer-led groups, and Baby Café sessions

with bilingual lactation professionals. Available both virtually and in person. [UMass Memorial HealthUMass Chan Medical School](#)

Massachusetts Breastfeeding Coalition & State Warmline

Coordinates support across the state, including a warmline (857-301-8259) that connects callers to peer counselors and local groups. Also offers broader breastfeeding resources and tools. [Mass.gov](#)

- **Abortion**

- Resources for abortion access, including legal resources and clinics.
- Information on reproductive rights and support services.

Reproductive Equity Now: <https://reproequitynow.org/>

- **Menopause**

- Guidance on menopause care, hormonal therapy, and community support.
- https://open.substack.com/pub/vajenda/p/running-on-empty-the-hidden-impact?utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email
- https://open.substack.com/pub/vajenda/p/menopause-hormone-therapy-mht-and?utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email
- https://open.substack.com/pub/vajenda/p/menopause-and-sleep-pee?utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web

- “The M Factor” documentary:
<https://www.pbs.org/show/the-m-factor-shredding-the-silence-on-menopause/>
- [Midi Health](#)- experts in menopause care

- Dr. Mary Claire Haver, MD [website](#), [book](#), and [Instagram](#)
- Aviva Romm, MD [website](#), [books](#), and [podcast](#)
- Christiane Northrup MD - [website](#) and [The Wisdom of Menopause](#) book
- Jenn Huber, RN, ND - [website](#), [blogs](#), and [The Midlife Feast](#) podcast
- Meredith Klein (Pranaful) - [website](#), [recipes](#), and [Kitchen Ritual](#) cookbook
- Sarah Shealy, MSN, RN, CNM, MSCP - [website](#) and offers a free menopause handbook on her website
- Strength training is very important now more than ever. [Elena Brower](#) offers strength-based approaches in her online yoga classes.
- [www.menopauseinfo.org](#) (Resources for women from the International Menopause Society)
- [www.endocrine.org](#) (Within that site, scroll down to “Menopause Map” which is menopause resources for women from the Endocrine Society.)
- [The New Menopause: Navigating Your Path Through Hormonal Change with Purpose, Power, and Facts](#) The author, an OB/GYN, also has a free podcast on Spotify on menopause.
- [www.menopause.org](#) (The North American Menopause Society—lots of information for medical providers but also for women. They have a database of doctors and NPs who have at least some specialty and/or training in menopause. They also have fact sheets and information that can be downloaded.
- Hit Play, Not Pause—an excellent podcast for active women entirely devoted to menopause, but also with a lot of information relevant to all women across the menopause spectrum. Emphasis on loving your body wherever it is.
- [The Center for Body Trust](#) for information, workbooks, new podcasts, training, unlearning and learning, and support.
- I highly recommend the client checks out Dr Jen Gunter. She has books, a website and a blog and is a board certified OBGYN with tons of info on menopause.
- <https://www.brighamandwomens.org/womens-health/fish-center/menopause-and-midlife-program>
- <https://portal.menopause.org/NAMS/NAMS/Directory/Menopause-Practitioner.aspx>
- Karuna is an agency in Norwood with nutritionists who take insurance. They do virtual as well (I meet with mine virtually and she's amazing). The agency is non-shaming and non-judgmental. I know mine understands menopause, hormonal shifts, etc. She even gets Parts work and is super supportive when I mention my Parts coming up in our sessions, or when a question she asks about my previous eating behaviors has my Parts speaking up.
- Also this book:
<https://www.amazon.com/Intuitive-Eating-4th-Anti-Diet-Revolutionary/dp/1250255198> • "Menopause Reset" by Mindy Pelz, MD
- Podcast:
<https://christyharrison.com/foodpsych/7/aging-diet-culture-and-body-changes-around-menopause-with-erica-leon>
- 1- Dr Mary Claire Haver
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQqcnYcKx68>
- 2- Dr. Lisa Mosconi
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cgo2mD4Pc54>

○

5. Violence Prevention

- **Teen Dating**

- Healthy Relationship resources.
 - [NAMI](#) groups
-

6. Domestic Violence Support

Transition House in Central Square Cambridge is great, offering advocacy/counseling and some temporary shelter. <https://www.transitionhouse.org/>

DOVE is in Quincy: <https://www.dovema.org/>

Casa Myrna <http://www.casamyrna.org/>

The Network La Red (specializes in LGBTQ)
<https://www.tnlr.org/en/>

The Second Step in Newton: <https://thesecondstep.org/>

Depending on where they live, they could find their local Community Behavioral Health Center [here](#). Make sure to go to the Community Behavioral Health Center that covers the area they live in. Same day walk-in services.

- **General Resources for Violence Prevention**

- Information on domestic violence (DV) resources, shelters, and advocacy groups.

HarborCOV

ReachMA

Child Care Resources – City of Chelsea, MA

1. **Massachusetts – Licensed Child Care Search**

Find licensed child care providers, preschools, and family child care homes in Chelsea and nearby cities.

 childcare.mass.gov

2. **Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA)**

Information on how to apply for financial help to pay for child care in Massachusetts.

 mass.gov/child-care-financial-assistance

3. **City of Chelsea – Family Assistance Programs**

Local information about programs for families with young children, including WIC and other supports.

 [chelseama.gov – Assistance Programs](https://chelseama.gov/Assistance-Programs)

4. **CAPIC – Chelsea/Revere Family Network**

Offers playgroups, parent workshops, literacy programs, and family events.

 capicinc.org/chelsea-revere-family-network

5. **CAPIC Head Start**

A free educational program for children ages 3–5 from low-income families.

 capicinc.org/capic-head-start

6. **CAPIC Child Development Center**

Child care for children from 8 weeks to 6 years old, designed for families who work or attend school.

 capicinc.org/capic-child-development-center

7. **Chelsea Public Schools – John Silber Early Learning Center**

Provides preschool, kindergarten, and first grade, with support for English learners and students with special needs.

 chelseaschools.com – Early Learning Center

8. **Child Care Choices of Boston (CCCB)**

Provides child care referrals, voucher management, and family guidance.

 bostonabcd.org/childcare-choices-of-boston

9. **Findhelp.org – Help Paying for Child Care**

Search for financial support options for child care in Chelsea.

 findhelp.org – Chelsea

10. **Winnie – Child Care Centers in Chelsea**

Directory with schedules, costs, and reviews of local child care centers and providers.

 winnie.com – Chelsea Child Care