



***Menstruation Management:
Practical Ways to Support Girls
and Women with Intellectual
and Developmental Disabilities***

Dr. Jennifer Summers, OTD, OT/L, FNAP

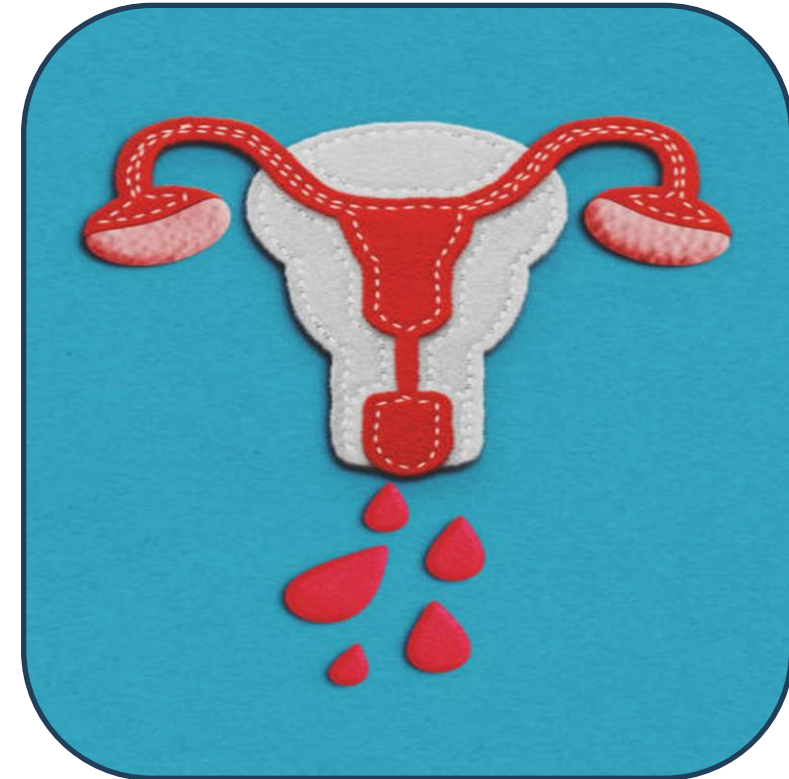
4/30/2026



What is our plan?

- What are current options for girls and women with IDD?
- What life activities are impacted by lack of menstruation management?
- What is involved with menstruation management?
- What are adapted ways to manage periods for girls and women with IDD?

What are we talking about today?



Disclaimer

Limited information and time

Menstruating bodies

Close ties with pregnancy prevention

What are options for girls and women with IDD?

Menstrual
suppression

- Medical management

Menstrual
management

- Disability rights groups

What are options for girls and women with IDD?

Menstrual
suppression

- Medical management



- Long term management
- Pregnancy prevention

- Health risks
- Risk for sexual violence
- Expensive
- Awareness

What are options for girls and women with IDD?

Menstrual
suppression

- Medical management

- Lack of training
- Lack of resources

What are options for girls and women with IDD?

Menstrual
management

- Disability rights groups



- Choice and control
- Sexual health training
- Natural body systems

- Time investment
- Limited support
- Limited research

What are options for girls and women with IDD?

Menstrual
management

- Disability rights groups

- Lack of training
- Lack of resources

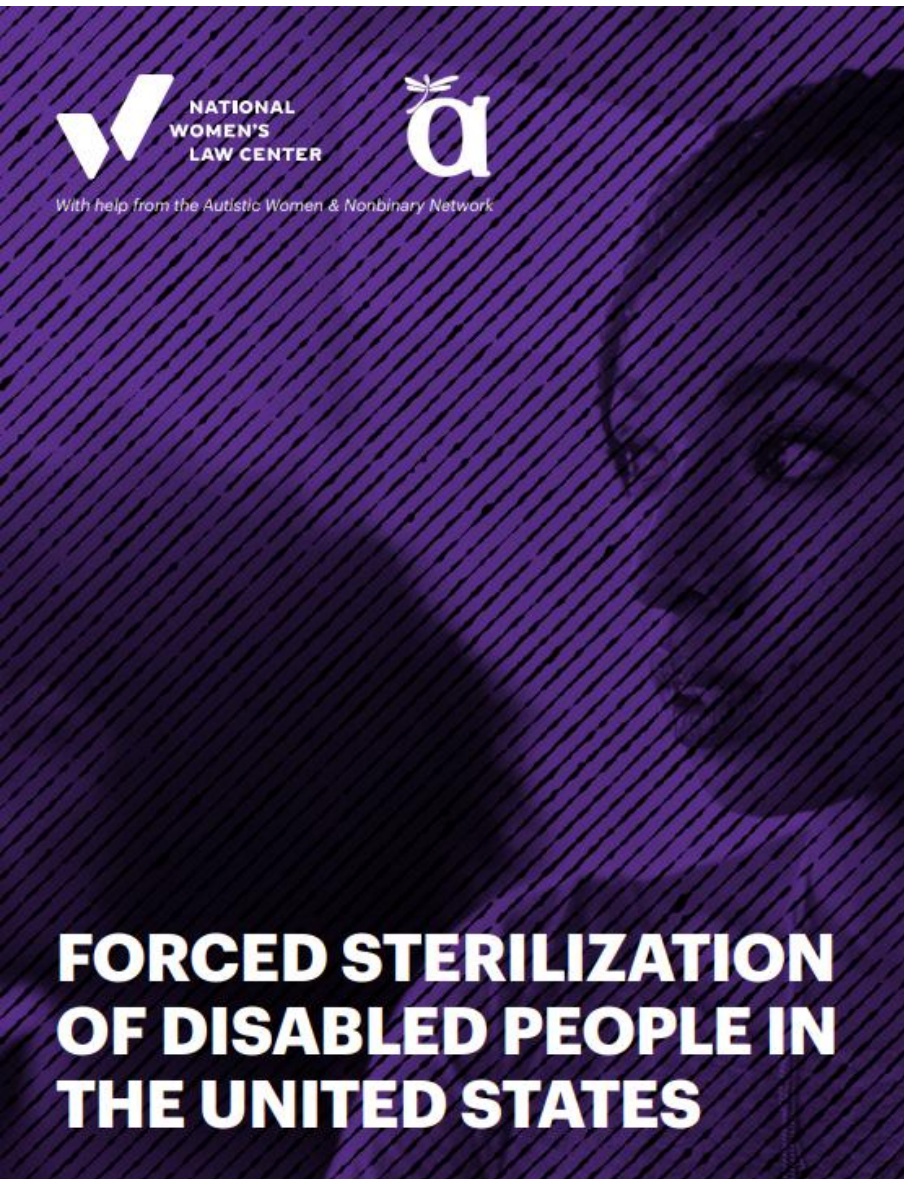
An example...



Australian Government

Australian Gov't Senate

- Committee determined there is a “shocking lack of resources” for menstruation management
- Families and medical workers are misinformed
- Lack of adapted sex education



An example...

ASHLEY'S STORY

Ashley X is a woman living in Washington. She is now in her 20s. When she was 6, her parents asked doctors to do a hysterectomy. They did not want her to get pregnant or have periods. They also wanted her to stay small like a child for the rest of her life. So doctors did a hysterectomy. They gave Ashley drugs that stopped her from growing. They also did an operation to stop her from having breasts.

These procedures are now called the "Ashley treatment." Many other parents have made their disabled children get the "Ashley treatment."⁴

NWLC, 2022

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Menstrual management

- Disability rights groups

Which life activities are limited by lack of menstruation management?

School and work



Sports and physical activities



Sexual health education



Health Management



Which life activities are limited by lack of menstruation management?



Sounds like a job for occupational therapy!

What exactly is menstrual management?

- Hand hygiene
- Selecting products
- Appropriate use of selected product
 - New and discarded
- Genital area hygiene
- Selection of appropriate environment to care for menstrual needs
- Time management (daily, weekly, monthly)
- Tracking cycle
- Fluid intake
- Selection of clothes
- Illness prevention
- Emotional regulation
- Pain management
- Intimacy management

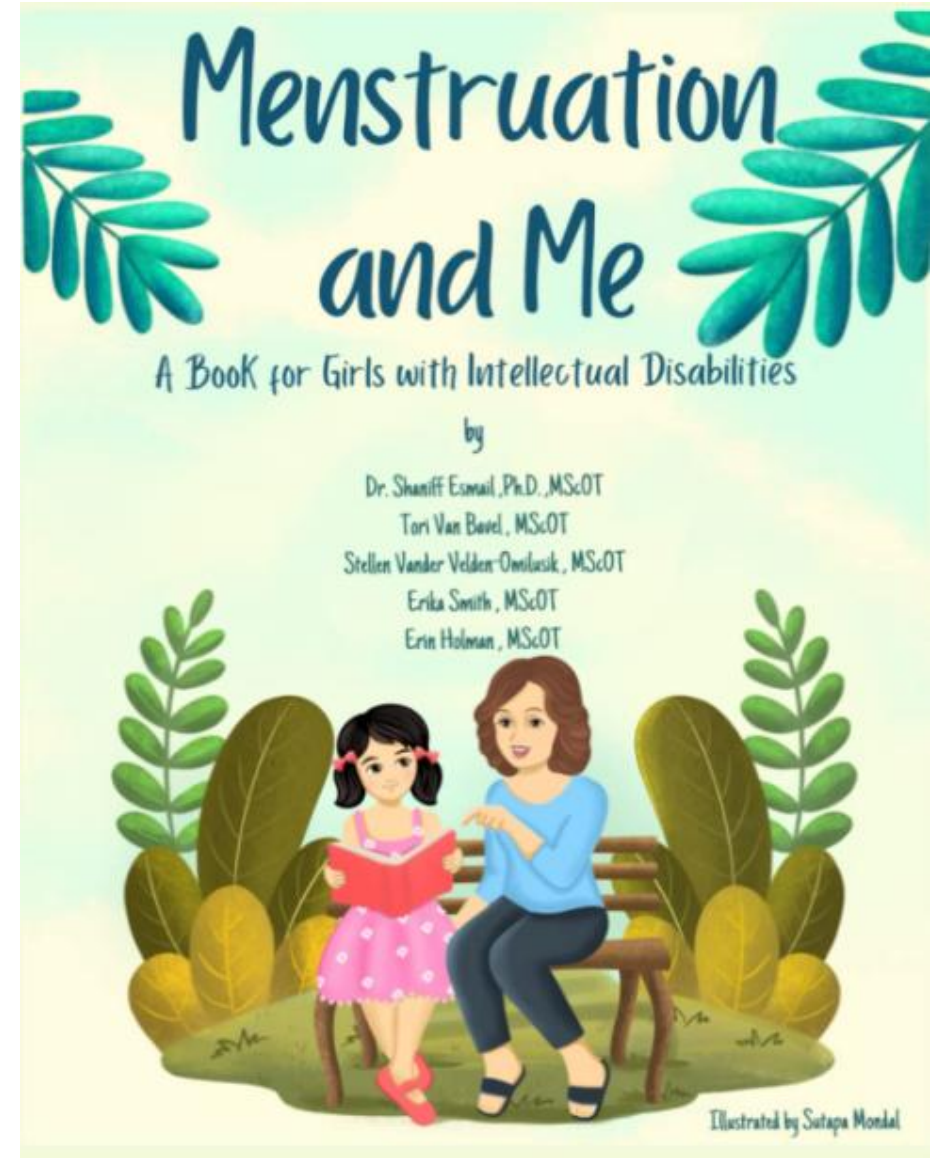
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Training strategies



Training strategies

- What products are available?
- How do I decide which product is right for me?
- How do the products work?
- How do I use the product I think is best?

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A. Pads



1. Disposable pads



2. Reusable pads



3. Panty liners

B. Tampons



1. Applicator tampons



2. Non-applicator tampons

C. Menstrual Cups



1. Silicone cups



2. TPE cups



3. Latex cups

D. Period Underwear



1. Disposable period underwear



2. Reusable period underwear

Considerations

- No insertion in vagina
- Flow – pad size and type
- Body size – pad size and type
- Time of change
 - Chaffing
 - Leakage
 - 3-4 hours (average flow)
- Material
 - Synthetic, cotton, hemp, bamboo

A. Pads



1. Disposable pads



2. Reusable pads



3. Panty liners

C. Menstrual Cups

Considerations

- Insert and extract from vagina
- Flow – Leakage if not positioned properly
- Body size – best for all body types
- Time of change – 10-12 hours
- Material
 - Type
 - Reusable - cleaning and sterilizing



B. Tampons



1. Applicator tampons



2. Non-applicator tampons

D. Period Underwear



Considerations

- Insert and extract from vagina
- Flow – tampon size and type
- Body size – tampon size and type
- Time of change
 - 4-6 hours (or sooner)
 - Infection risk
- Material
 - Type - Cotton v cotton blend

1. Applicator
tampons

2. Non-applicator
tampons

D. Period Underwear



1. Disposable period
underwear



2. Reusable period
underwear

Considerations

- No insertion in vagina
 - Can be paired with other products
- Flow – underwear size and type
- Body size – generally S-XL
- Time of change
 - Widely variable depending on type
- Material
 - Leakage proof /resistant

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www.tinahealthcare.com

Works with
most tampon
brands!

- Tampax
- Playtex
- Kotex
- Cora
- LOLA

*Check out our Tampon
Compatibility Guide for
more options!





<https://www.hanes.com>



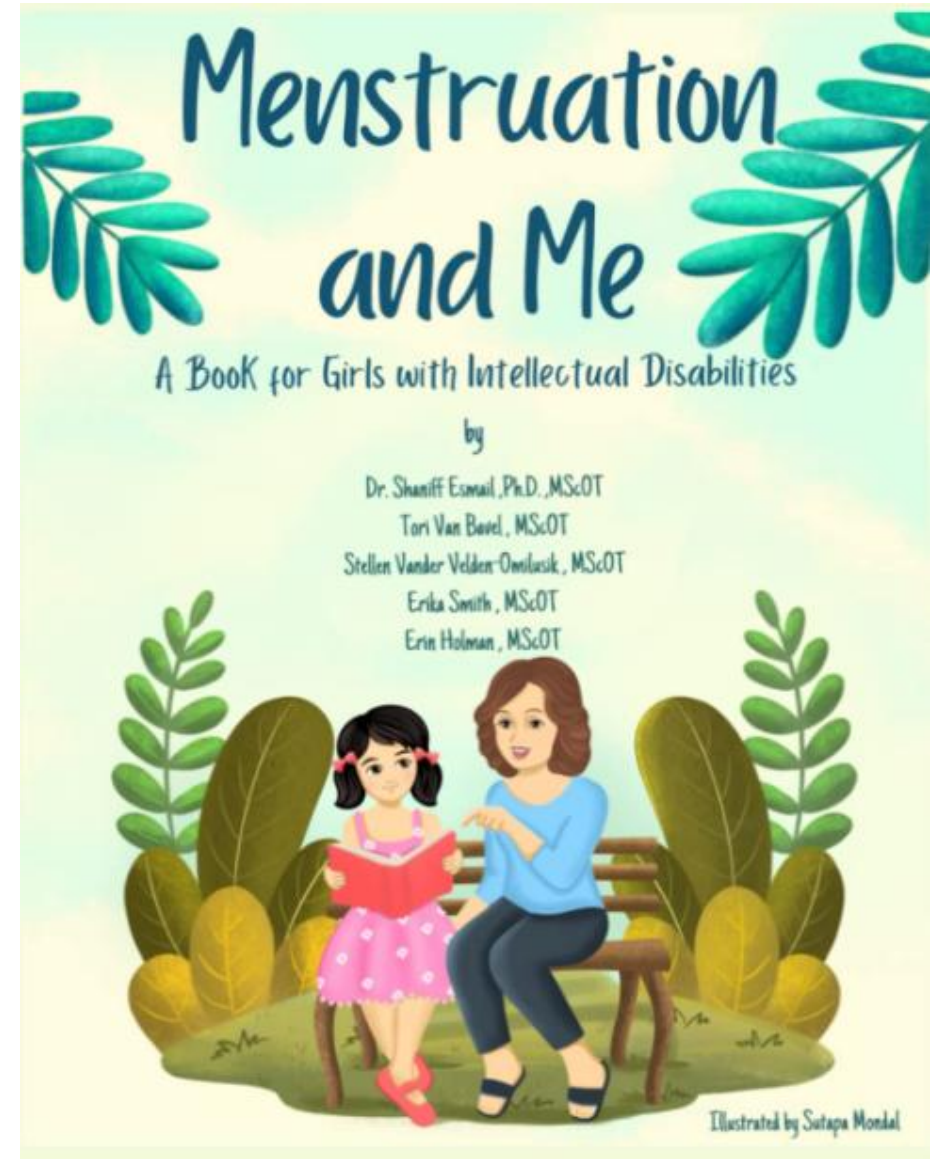
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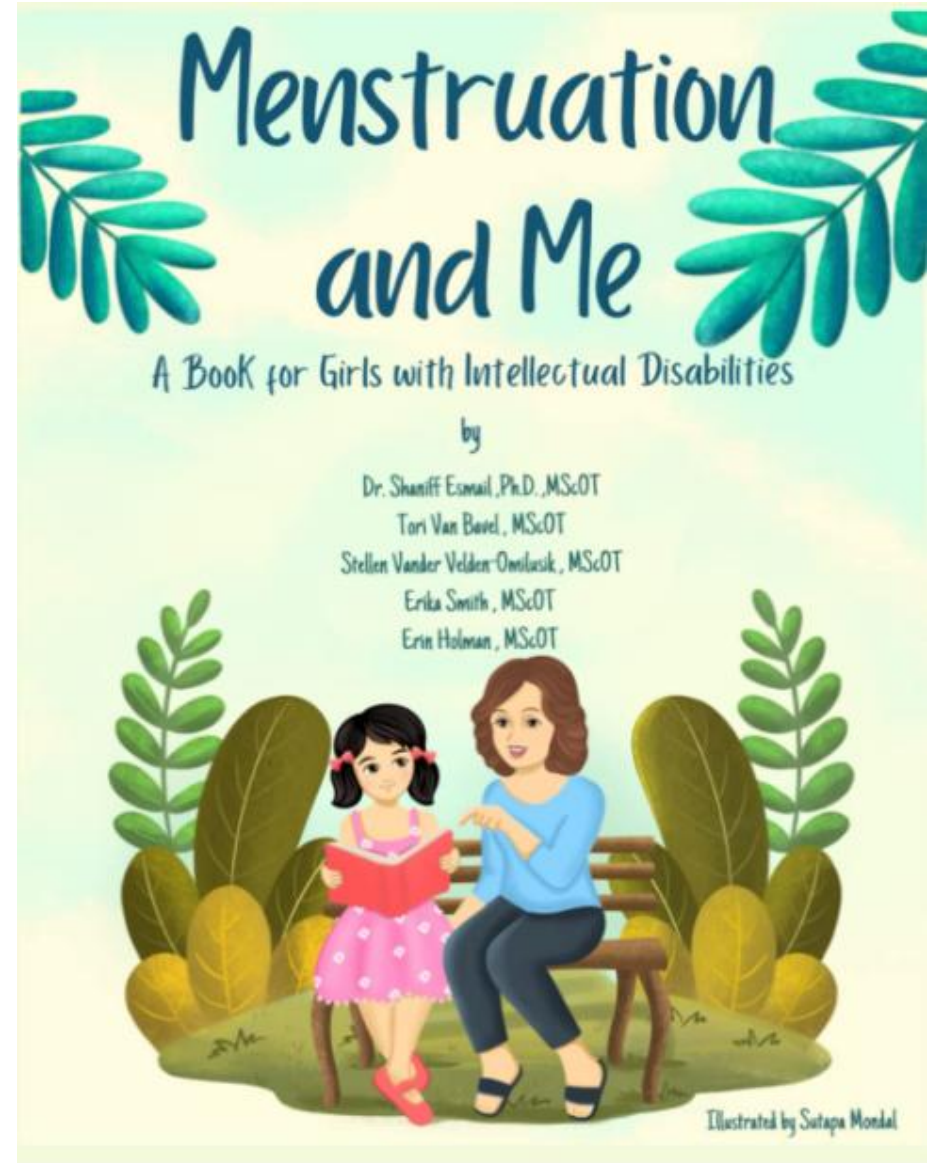
Period Project 21: *Exploring Pads*

Now let's see how pads work! With your mom or trusted adult, pour water mixed with red food colouring on a pad, a little bit at a time. Notice how much liquid is absorbed! How does the liquid look as it gets absorbed by the pad? How can you tell when the pad is "full" and needs to be changed? Try this activity with every size of pad.



Period Project 22: *Exploring Tampons*

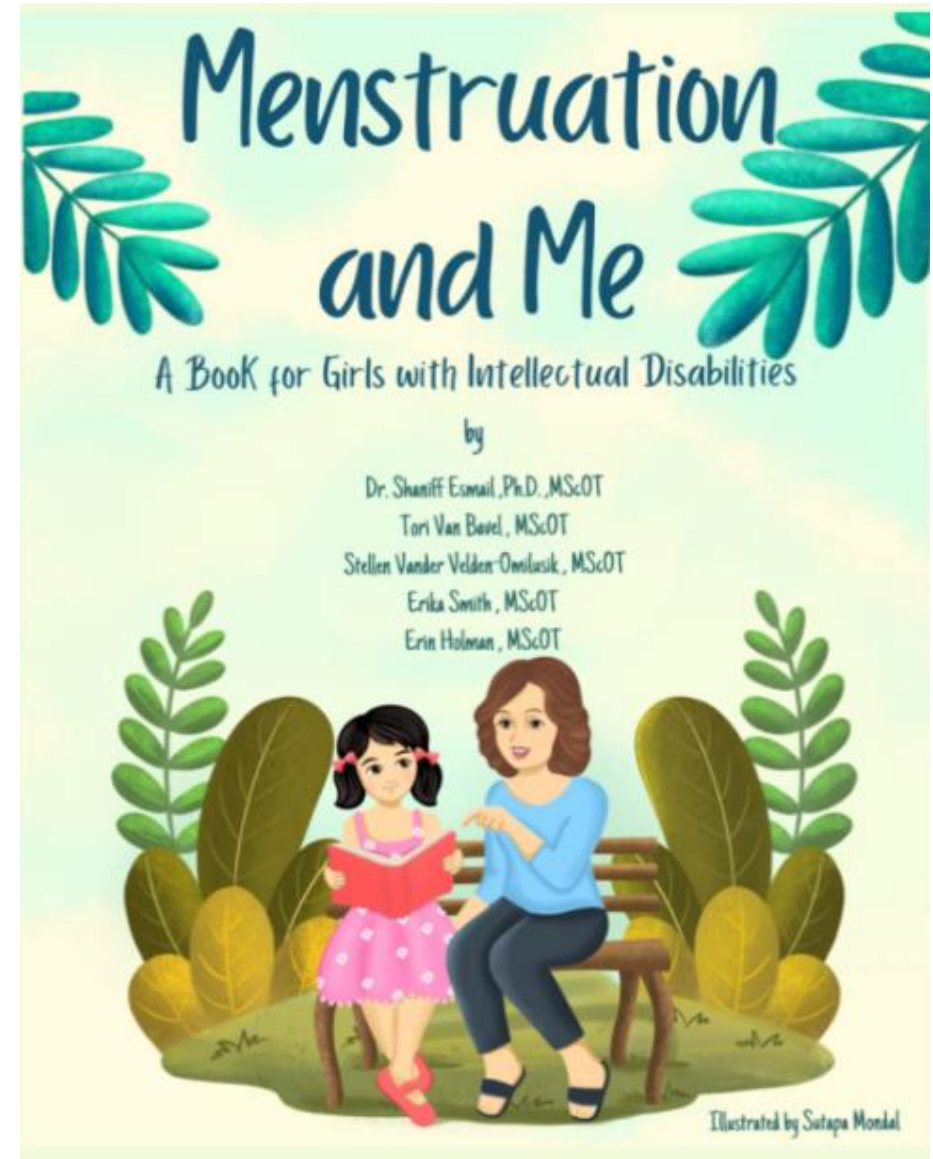
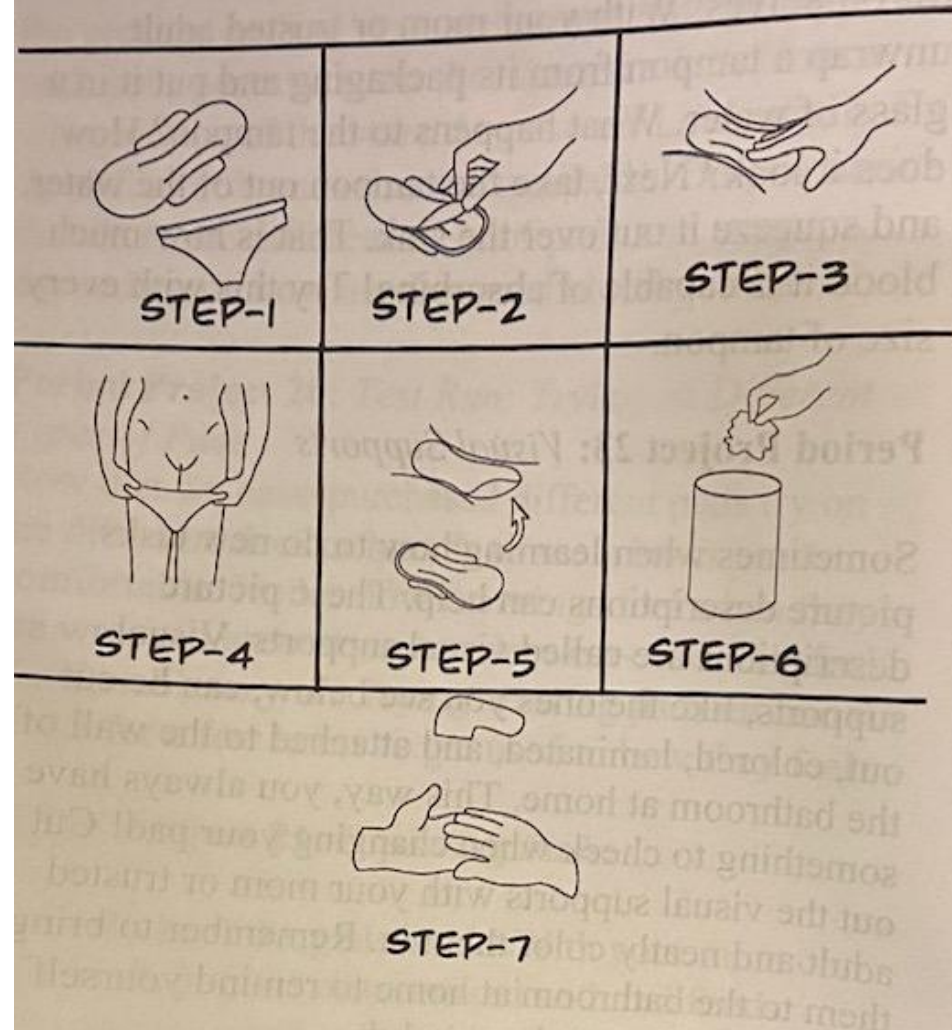
Are you curious about how tampons work? Let's see for ourselves! With your mom or trusted adult, unwrap a tampon from its packaging and put it in a glass of water. What happens to the tampon? How does it look? Next, take the tampon out of the water, and squeeze it out over the sink. That is how much blood it is capable of absorbing! Try this with every size of tampon.



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Period Project 23: *Visual Supports cont.*



Training strategies

- What products are available?
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What are
strategies
that
worked for
you?



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Upcoming Events - Menstruation Management Series:

- 5/19/26 – 6pm CT (online)- [*Tracking Cycles and Time Management*](#)
- 6/16/2026 – 6pm CT (online) – *Period Hygiene*
- 7/21/2026 – 6pm CT (online): *Which Products are Right for You?*
- 8/18/2026 – 6pm CT (online): *Managing Cramps and Discomfort*

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