

Audio Transcription: Myth or Menstruation

Jess: Hello everyone, and welcome to Myth or Menstruation- brought to you by SHORE Centre and the Kitchener Public Library. Due to the current government suggestions and in light of COVID-19, we've adjusted the Myth or Menstruation event to an online format so we can all continue to practice social distancing and keep everyone safe. SHORE stands for Sexual Health, Options, Resources, and Education and SHORE Centre works to provide access to each of these things. SHORE Centre is a sex positive and pro-choice organization located in Kitchener-Waterloo, advocating for barrier free, inclusive, and accessible sexual and reproductive options in addition to promoting the autonomy of people and their choices surrounding their bodies. SHORE Centre provides inclusive and accessible sexual reproductive health services such as medical abortions, birth control counseling, pregnancy tests, and IUD insertions as well as free inclusive sexual health education in schools across the community. Myth or Menstruation is an event hosted by the Kitchener Public Library and SHORE Centre, celebrating the experiences of people who menstruate. Today we will be reading the stories people have shared with the SHORE Centre surrounding menstruation. This event and the stories we hear today hope to normalize talking about periods and to bond through hearing each other's experiences. We believe that hearing different perspectives about the influence menstruation has had in people's lives, both positively and negatively, is beneficial to discuss and menstruation is definitely part of sexual health. My name is Jess and I was a practicum student at SHORE Centre this year and I will be doing the intro and outro to today's podcast. We will also be hearing from Maddy and Brockenshire, who work as sexual health educators at SHORE Centre. Maddy will be sharing the stories of those who did not record their own audios and Brockenshire will be transitioning us between stories. So grab some snacks, and get comfortable, and let's talk about periods!

Brockenshire: Hi! I'm Brockenshire and the first story you will hear is mine; a short reflection on my own ignorance. Each year when we put together this myth or menstruation, I think about how many people couldn't find answers to their questions when they were young and how much work we still have to do. I call this story, The Question Box.

Brockenshire: I've never menstruated, but I do talk about it a lot. This wasn't always true though. I can think back to when I was a pre-teen and early teenager hearing whispered conversations about periods, pads, and cramps. I had no idea that there was a difference between period cramps and the cramps that I experienced running cross country. Clearly, I had no idea what was going on in a person's uterus during their period. Someone close to me shared her story about going through puberty. Her mom tried to have open conversations with her, and before her first period her mom let her know what was going to happen and why. But one important detail was left out, you see, her mom never really experienced cramps or pain with her period and so didn't mention that this might happen to other people who get their period. You can imagine the shock and disappointment when she became acutely aware of the fact that her periods were not pain free. As a sexual health educator with SHORE, I have the unique pleasure and privilege of teaching about puberties, periods, and sexual health to students across Waterloo region. One of my favourite parts of our workshops, is answering student's anonymous questions that they've dropped into the question box. Anything they're curious about, unsure about, confused about, it all goes in the question box and Maddy and I answer each and every question truthfully, factually, and usually without giggling or blushing. I

keep track of all the questions that students submit. For this podcast I collected a sample that were asked just over a few grade 5 and 6 workshops.

- Do periods hurt?
- When does it stop?
- Is there a way to stop your period from coming because it's inconvenient and annoying?
- Do tampons take your virginity?
- How did Niki Minaj get through her period if she wears a thong all the time?
- Should you tell your mom or your dad about your first period?
- How do you make a friend feel better if they get their period?
- How do you know how far to push a tampon in?
- Can an egg fall out of your uterus during your period?
- If you get period blood on your pee pee what will happen?
- Can you pee with a tampon in?
- How come periods are so erratic at the beginning?
- Are all periods erratic at the start?

And so, so many more. Maybe these questions remind you of yourself? Think back to before you knew about periods and the questions you had. Who answered them? How did they answer your questions? What do you wish they had said? Think about the young people in your life, had you talked with them about periods? How do you wish those conversations went? It's on all of us to figure out how to create a space for people of all genders to feel comfortable to ask their questions and collectively shed the shame that ensnares us. This is why I do this work, and I know that many of you are working towards the same vision.

Brockenshire: Would it be weird to say “thanks for sharing” about my own story? Probably, so let's keep going! Next up we have a story submitted by Lacy about the ridiculous and awkward moments that come with being a parent of a young child. Not going to lie, when I first heard this story I was red from second hand embarrassment. Thanks to Maddy for reading Lacy's story!

Maddy: I would like to start out by saying I have a three-year-old and as many parents know bringing a toddler to the washroom can be kind of nerve wracking. I had my period out of nowhere one day while shopping in Walmart and I didn't have my cup with me so I had to buy one of those .25 cent tampons from the dispenser. When I cleaned up and put it in my son and I went to wash our hands. A sweet looking older woman came in and my son turns to her and looks at her proudly and says, “My mom put one of those sticks in her bum hole”. I'm not sure who was more embarrassed or shocked, I then had to have the most child friendly period talk with him while shopping in Walmart. He is curious to know when he will get his period too as I kept menstruation as gender neutral as possible.

Brockenshire: Yay, for gender inclusive sex ed lessons! That warms my heart. I love how Lacy dove into this conversations while shopping at Walmart. What a pro! Coming up next, Maddy is going to read another story, this one submitted by Ellie. Let's find out what happened to Ellie while at Canada's Wonderland.

Maddy: When I was in grade 6 I went to Canada's Wonderland with my family. Now at the time both my dad and I were scared when it came to roller coasters so I would go with him while my sibling and my mom went on rides. That day my stomach was feeling funky, and so I stopped at the bathroom. I looked down and I had gotten my first period at Canada's wonderland with my

dad. I remember sitting in the stall yelling, "Help!" trying to get someone's attention. But, either no one heard me, or everyone just ignored me. When I met my dad after the bathroom, he asked me what was wrong. He said I was pale, and I just gulped and said I was fine. When I met up with my mom, I told her later and she told my dad. My dad being the sweet dad he is, very awkwardly came into my room and asked if I needed help with my homework. He couldn't look me in the eye though and all he said was "um...so, your mom told me you got your....ya know". So, in summary, I got my period while I was alone with my dad at Canada's Wonderland, could have been worse though!

Brockenshire: Honestly, you say, "It could have been worse" but I am not really sure how. I won't dwell on that too long though, except to say, I hop you've had better experiences at Wonderland since then. Next up, we have a story about the things we try ourselves when no one teaches us about our bodies. Thanks to Maddy for reading and recording for this story.

Maddy: I got my first period when I was twelve. I'll always remember it was June 1st, almost the end of my grade 6 year, and I could taste the freedom of summer. I came home from school one day and went to the bathroom, noticing a brown stain on my underwear. "Great," I thought, "I'm 12 and I just pooped my pants. How embarrassing"! I changed my underwear and did some homework. About an hour later my underwear felt wet again, and assuming it was summer time sweat, I ignored it. Eventually when I went to the bathroom again and the stain was back, I clued in. I had sort of learned about periods, but no one had ever told me they could be brown. I had no idea what was going on, so I rolled up some toilet paper and went off to my soccer game. For anyone who has ever seen soccer shorts, you will know how easily the toilet paper could have flown out of my pants and across the field with all the running and kicking I was doing. I'm grateful to this day that it did not. A couple months later I got my period again and I was at the beach on vacation. I felt ready to try a tampon for the first time because nothing was going to stop me from swimming in the ocean. I checked the instructions on the box, washed my hands, got all ready, and properly inserted the tampon into my... urethra. For those who are a little unsure about vulva anatomy the urethra is for urine and absolutely not the spot for a tampon. It should have been in the vagina. I didn't know that it was in the wrong spot and that it wasn't supposed to hurt, so I waddled down to the beach in agonizing pain. I only lasted about ten minutes before saying to myself, "that's it. If this is what a tampon is, I want no part of it", and waddled back home to remove it. I'm thankful that now I know a lot more about periods than I did at that age, but I wish that everyone could know more about their periods. Maybe then we wouldn't have so much fear and pain surrounding them.

Brockenshire: Was anyone else cringing and grimacing at the idea of waddling up and down the beach with a tampon in the urethra, I can't be the only one. Every period lesson that Maddy and I teach, we make sure to also teach anatomy, including what we call the three "p's"; pee, period, and poop - One separate opening for each. Coming up, we have a short story about getting a first period away from home. Here's Maddy reading the story.

Maddy: I got my period while windsurfing at girl's overnight camp. All I saw was blood and literally thought I was attacked by a shark or fish or something. But it turns out it was just my period. I didn't have my mom there and I was hours away from home, so I had to have an awkward conversation with a guy counsellor. He told me I'd be fine and handed me a tampon. I was terrified, I had no idea how to use it. Thank god for some random person in my cabin who gave me a pad. LOL, good times, I was 12 by the way.

Brockenshire: I'm so glad that another camper was there to give you a pad. We're now going to hear from two local KW based menstrual organizations and they'll tell you how they can use your support.

The Period Purse: When I heard that the Kitchener Public Library and SHORE Centre were teaming up to bring myth or menstruation into podcast format, I was so excited! Hi there, this is Kevin Hiebert. Who am I? I'm the director of business development at Changing the Flow, a Waterloo Region based social enterprise focused on bringing menstrual equity to the country. I'm also very excited to be the co-founder and co-leader of the Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge chapter of the Period Purse. What's the Period Purse you say? Great question, why don't I tell you? The Period Purse is Canada's first charitable organization dedicated to the cause of menstrual equity and helping alleviate period poverty. The Period Purse was started in 2017 in Toronto by Jana Girdauskas and has quickly grown to multiple chapters across the country including the Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge chapter that Kate Elliott and myself founded in 2018 and have been leading since. We collect donations of period products, purses, soap, face clothes, socks, underwear, chocolate bars, granola bars, and then we redistribute those in beautiful period purses that we put together along with our amazing volunteers at our period packing parties and those purses go out to organizations that help marginalized menstruators in our community. It's a very, very important cause and as you probably know, periods don't stop for anything and so that means there are plenty of folks that are disproportionately affected by things like a pandemic, or the resulting lockdowns and a myriad of other things that go on in our society and community every day. And that is why I am so committed to working with Kate and the Period Purse to ensure that we are able to help those in need during this difficult time, and quite frankly, until there no longer is a need for folks to have free, accessible, and safe period products when and where they need them. We would love it if you could help support our cause. In Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge, you can follow us on Facebook. Find our Facebook page, "The Period Purse- KWC", and you can find out all about the Period Purse at "theperiodpurse.com".

Changing the Flow: Changing the Flow is a social enterprise that achieves menstrual equity in the workplace and public spaces through awareness, education and implementation. So, through consulting and education services we assist organizations like, schools municipalities, and private businesses, with achieving their menstrual equity goals. And we know that menstrual equity can be quite an overwhelming concept, but in its simplest we work to make sure that menstruation is destigmatized and that every public and workplace washroom will provide period products. All support is appreciated and if you know anyone we should work with, then we would love to know. And you can find us on social media "@changingtheflow" or our website is "changingtheflow.ca".

Brockenshire: Next up, we have Robyn sharing her menstrual cup saga.

Robyn: My name is Robyn and I am the special projects coordinator at CHORE Centre. When I started to work at SHORE full time in 2018 it felt like everyone was getting on the menstrual cup train. I started to seriously consider it too. But I thought to myself, what size am I? How the heck to you get something like that up there? Clearly despite the fact that I work for a sexual and reproductive health organization I still have a lot to learn about my own body. After months of trying to figure out what size I needed as a 30 year old menstruating human, I decided to be brave and make my choice. In September I finally purchased a menstrual cup. I was eager to start using it. It was a Saturday night and I could see that my cycle was picking up steam. 2

Months later I bravely went where I'd never gone before. I was interested in trying a menstrual cup so I might not have to change a tampon so often. No more leaks, no more lost underwear, a period product that would allow me to save the environment, required fewer washroom trips, and above all else I desperately wanted to be one of those cool menstrual cup people. I wanted my feminist stamp of approval. I folded the cup several times, "how is this going to get in there"? I doubted myself. "Surely I could do this". "Come on Robyn, just breathe. You got this" I pushed. Finally! I fist pumped, it was 7 pm Saturday night and I had conquered the menstrual cup. I frantically texted a few of my friends and several hours later, fell asleep on the couch. I woke up at 2 am and decided to check my cup before I migrated to bed. I was excited to see how much blood was in there. Oh, no. This cannot be happening to me. I poked and prodded but could not for the life of me break the seal. Breathe Robyn, you can do this. But desperately I tried everything, a bath, a towel on my bed, different squatting positions, I couldn't get a good enough grip to get it out. I considered asking a friend to come help me, but I was too embarrassed, so Instead I frantically googled nearby walking clinics, I did not want to go to the emergency room. I found a clinic close by that would be open at 9 am. Worst case scenario, I told my 3 am self, I would go in the morning and hope I could convince whichever doctor was working to help me. No emergency room embarrassment here, or traumatizing my friend. I went to sleep. I woke up the next morning and tried again, surely now that I wasn't panicking I would be able to break the seal. No such luck. SO I got in my car and drove to the clinic. It wasn't open yet, looking at the other people waiting I felt terrible knowing that my simple problem would somehow take time away from people who really needed to see a doctor. I wondered how many humans like myself, were forced to come to this clinic because they did not have a primary care provider, but that's another issue for another time. I get taken into the exam room right away. I explain to the nurse how easy I think my problem is, how quickly it could be solved if she just looked, her fingers could reach, her fingers could break the seal where mine had failed. She told me to wait for the doctor. A man walks in and asks me how I'm doing. I reply that I'm okay, even though I've been stressing since 2 am that I'm going to die. I ask him how he is. He proceeds to tell me without skipping a beat that he's terrible. He launches into a short rant about how terrible his job is, how no one would possible become a doctor is they knew how bad it was when they were in medical school. I'm horrified, but I don't know what to say. I need this man to help me. I am not going to the emergency room. I tell him what's wrong and I explain what I need. "It's easy" I said. "All I need for you to do it break the seal so we can remove it". I gesture with my hands and show him how. He'll try, but he insists he needs his nurse and his equipment. Luckily this dude was able to get my menstrual cup out of me and it hurt a lot. He used a speculum which did not need to happen. He poked and prodded around and I felt a lot of uncomfortable pressure. But soon a volcano of blood escaped me, and I was free. Extremely embarrassed, but free. When I got home I googled the reviews of this walk in clinic. It turns out that my experience with this doctor was quite common. Other folks say that he's a good doctor, but that he regularly tells his patients how much he hates his job. These were my Sunday options; an emergency room visit, or a dude who clearly hates his job. I didn't reinsert my menstrual and told myself if I ever tried again I would keep a friend on standby just in case. Today is April 21st 2020, it's almost been 6 months and today happens to be the first heavy day of my period. I am happy to report that I got a new menstrual cup that I think is a better fit for my vagina and as soon as I'm done recording this I'm going to go and try to take it out because I successfully put it in a few hours ago. If this happens to you, it's nothing to feel bad about. Menstrual cups are not for everyone, but I really but I really hope the one I'm using now is right for me.

Brockenshire: Thanks for sharing your story Robyn! I wonder if next year's Myth of Menstruation will have an update. For those of you who are curious the website, "putacupinit" has reviews of nearly 200 different menstrual cups. Feel free to check it out. Up next we have a story from a SHORE Centre volunteer. Another vacation, another unforgettable memory. Here's Abby sharing her story.

Abby: A menstrual memory that comes to mind is when I was 15. I already had me period for 6 years but I hadn't successfully used a tampon yet, thankfully I got the hang of them by the next summer. My family was up north at our trailer by the river where we go tubing, and I got to bring my best friend with. The dilemma was I had my period. Sadly, 15 year old me had minimal knowledge of menstruation and how period products actually work. Getting for tubing on my period, I put on an overnight pad – so a large long pad- on my smallest underwear, then put on my swimsuit bottoms, then put on some swim shorts on top of that. Feeling diapered up, I waddled down to the dock. Once tubing I was beginning to forget about my makeshift diaper and having fun, until I fell off. Breaking the surface of the water I noticed I couldn't now feel a water filled pad, but of course, but of course, what floats up beside me? The pad.

Brockenshire: Thanks for sharing Abby! I cracked up at the line "feeling diapered up". Honestly, I don't think I expected to hear the word "waddling" as many times in stories as we have had today, I'm learning in this podcast. Finally, we have one last story to share. You've heard Maddy's voice on this podcast reading other people's stories, and here at last, is her own.

Maddy: I went to Catholic school my whole life, so as you can imagine nobody ever really explained to me what a period was or how to use products like pads or tampons. Growing up, I remember my friends would talk about it, but being raised the way I was - a girl surrounded by boys in a catholic family- I was kind of hoping periods didn't apply to me. I remember for my 12th birthday party we went to the movies to see 17 Again with Zack Effron. Side note- I was obsessed with High School Musical growing up and the fact that this movie came out on my birthday only further fed my delusion that Zack Effron and I were going to get married one day. Anyway, before the movie, my friend was using the bathroom in the stall next to me and whispered to me, "I need a pad". I had to go out of the bathroom to get my mom who only had a tampon so she had to talk her through inserting a tampon for the first time in a public bathroom with everyone listening. In hindsight, I should have stayed and listened to the instructions, but I just remembered thinking, "that really sucks for her. Glad I'll never have to deal with that". What helped my denial a lot was the fact that I didn't get my period until I was 18. So all the stuff my friends were going through together between the ages of 8 to 15, I was going through alone, terrified that someone would think I was weird if I told them what was going on. As we know, when people first start getting their periods they can be pretty inconsistent, coming only once every few months. My first summer of university I went on a trip with my friends to Vancouver. I was so excited about this trip! It was the first one I had taken without my parents. It had been a few months since my last period, which were always pretty inconsistent, so I didn't really even think about preparing for it when I was preparing for the trip. On the first day we were there I was walking down the streets of Vancouver when I looked down and my period had bled all the way through my shorts and was now running down my leg into a pool on the sidewalk. Thank god for my friend who went and got me tampons while I sat in a gas station washroom. We were pretty far away from where we were staying, so we went to Winners and bought me a whole new outfit and I carried my bloody shorts in a plastic bag all day while exploring Vancouver. I have a lot more stories like that, of being in my first year of university still confused on how to

deal with a period properly. I wish that someone had taught me about sexual health growing up for a variety of reasons. If someone had taken the time to talk to me, maybe I would have realized that the reason I wasn't getting my period was because I had a lot of body dysmorphia, and wasn't eating as much as I should have been. Or, that refusing to accept that something is going to happen, won't stop it from happening. Now, as a sexual health educator, I get to look at the relief on a lot of kid's faces when I explain to them why these things are happening to their bodies and that it doesn't have to be something associated with fear or pain. Now I would really like to go back to my younger self and explain to her what she needed to hear. It would have prevented me from a lot of embarrassing moments. Who knows, maybe Zack Efron and I would be married right now if something had gone differently.

Jess: Thank you to everyone who tuned in today, we hope you enjoyed those stories as much as we did. Thank you to everyone who shared their experiences with us and for those that submitted audio clips of their stories. It's greatly appreciated on behalf of the SHORE Centre and the Kitchener Public Library. A big thank you to the Kitchener Public Library for providing SHORE Centre with this platform and for making the Myth or Menstruation event possible. Thank you to the Period Purse and Changing the Flow for supporting this event and for the work they do. And thank you to Dylan Taylor from @BLANKS for providing the music heard throughout today's podcast. We hope everyone enjoyed today's segment, please stay tuned on SHORE Centre's socials for more to come. If you have a period story you want to share, please check out SHORE Centre's Instagram @SHORECentreWR as well as check out the SHORE facebook page where we will be providing a platform to further the discussion. And for some fun sexual health related videos, please check out SHORE Centre's tiktok page @SHORECentreWR. That's it for today, thanks for tuning in.

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