

Report: Women are still being failed when it comes to talking openly about periods

May 12 2023, by Hannah Severyn

Alternative terms used to describe periods

Gen Zs		Millennials	
Term used	Frequency (Most to least)	Term used	Frequency (Most to least)
time of the month		time of the month	
monstrous		my cycle	
being on		Aunt Flo is visiting	
being hormonal		being hormonal	
inconvenient		bleeding	
monthlies		coming on	
Mother Nature's visited this house		having my flowers	
on the blob		leaking	
on the mountain		Niagara Falls	
uterus time		on my reds	
werewolf time		on my Ps	
(consciously not using a term that specifies gender)			

Credit: *On the Blob: Millennials vs. Gen Zs talk menstrual health* (2023).

Younger generations want to talk more openly about periods but they aren't being supported by leading period product brands.

Research by experts at the University of Nottingham and health communications agency Thrive: Words that change lives has found that Gen Z people (born 1997-2012) are far more open about menstrual health than Millennials (born 1981-1996). However, they still report feeling emotionally unprepared for starting their periods. Many said that their periods started unexpectedly and that their schools contributed to period taboos.

The research has been documented in a [white paper](#) called "On the Blob: Millennials vs. Gen Zs talk menstrual health." It details how different generations communicate about periods and how commercial brands are failing to address the issues and experiences of young women. The white paper also provides actionable recommendations to period product brands on how they can reach their audiences more effectively.

The research involved 10 focus groups—five with Gen Z women and five with Millennial women. The groups were run by health communication researchers from Thrive. Researchers from the University of Nottingham then analyzed the language used by participants when discussing menstrual health, as well as online content from 14 well-known period product brands.

The research found:

- Openness about menstrual well-being and symptoms is increasing; [younger women](#) are much more likely to discuss their periods with friends. In fact, it binds their friendships closer.
- Some [period](#) products, particularly tampons, still engender fear among younger age groups.
- The impact of mood and stress-related menstrual symptoms on women's everyday lives is not recognized.
- Women are still fed up with advertising that promotes unrealistic aspirations—they want brands to keep pace with cultural and [social changes](#), to provide a wider view of what menstruating means.
- More support is needed for symptoms beyond pain, cramps and heavy flow. Women want space to talk about subjects including moodiness and irritability, their lack of sex drive and having to stop doing their usual activities.
- Further guidance is needed on menstrual health throughout different life stages. While there is plenty of good information on what's normal, especially for younger women, women want to know how their menstrual health will change with age.

The research was carried out by Dr. Emma McClaughlin, Research Fellow in Corpus Linguistics, and Svenja Adolphs, Professor in English Language and Linguistics at the University of Nottingham. The Thrive team included Gayatri Koshy and Francesca Thomas.

"This work highlights the nuanced experiences of people who menstruate and the barriers to menstrual well-being and empowerment they may face at different life stages. Our recommendations will support brands to provide accurate, accessible, and age-appropriate information, which reflects the realities of managing menstruation for different age groups. By confronting the misconceptions, taboos and stigma that compromise menstrual health, this research ultimately contributes to closing the gender health gap," says Dr. Emma McClaughlin.

"Poor health literacy is a big contributor to the gender health gap in the UK. This piece of research has valuable lessons for health communicators on how to reach different generations of women with the information they need to engage more actively with their menstrual health. At the same time, the research also highlights the promising role commercial brands can have to destigmatise menstrual health and improve women's health in general," says Gayatri Koshy.

The UK's gender health gap means women face a higher prevalence of illness, poorer health outcomes and restricted access to health services compared to men. This project, therefore, champions women's health brands to bridge the gap and empower women to openly discuss their experiences and the issues they face.

More information: Report: [On the Blob: Millennials vs. Gen Zs talk menstrual health](#)

Provided by University of Nottingham

Citation: Report: Women are still being failed when it comes to talking openly about periods (2023, May 12) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-05-women-periods.html>

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