



Just in Time for Lola

Lola Blackman talks to host Kamilah Kashanie about being a late bloomer, her feelings about the idea of “womanhood,” and wondering when she would finally get her period. Our producer, Mia Warren, also investigates why people are late bloomers – spoiler alert: there’s nothing wrong with it!

- Vox #1: *A period...uh...[laughs].*
- Vox #2: *When you’re like, at a certain age, when you get puberty, usually. But, I don’t really know how to explain, like, everything else.*
- Vox #3: *Um...it is...you know, it’s something that happens once a month for women. And, it’s...How do you explain this?*
- Vox #4: *Wow, I’ve never had to explain this! Um...*
- Vox #5: *Um...it’s part of the natural cycle of, uh, nature. It’s, like, happened through evolution, um...did I say that wrong?*
- Vox #6: *You said three natural cycles.*
- Vox #7: *Oh, did I?*
- Narration: This is Feeling My Flo, a podcast where we see menstruation as an event that happens to all types of bodies. I’m Kamilah Kashanie. My pronouns are she and her.

So, periods. The scientific term is menstruation. You’ve probably heard the word, and if you haven’t experienced it yourself, you probably know someone who has.

Menstruation’s been happening to humans forever. But, for some reason, it’s so hard to talk about. People even have trouble describing what it is. We asked, and it was pretty awkward.

Vox #6: *I don't know, it's just...it's blood. And, like, some people, they're not comfortable with blood. So it's just like...I guess...uh, it's just an embarrassing subject.*

Vox #7: *Um, once a month, a woman bleeds, because their body has not had a child, so they're getting rid of all the stuff inside I guess [laughs]. I don't really [laughs] yeah.*

Narration: For the record: in simple terms, a period is when blood and tissue from your uterus come out of your vagina. It usually happens once a month. And even that is hard to get people to say.

But, at Feeling My Flo, we think everyone should be talking more about periods. And that's exactly what we're going to do.

So, why am I hosting this show? Well, for starters, I'm someone who has a period. And, I'm definitely not an expert, but I'm in my early 20s, and that means I've been menstruating for over half my life. That's a good amount of period experience. Having a period is part of who I am, but it's not a part I get to talk about often. Our show's creators and I figured a lot of people probably feel the same way, and that's why we started Feeling My Flo.

The thing is: talking about periods isn't always easy. Folks have all kinds of complicated feelings about menstruation. So, on Feeling My Flo, we're going to do our best to dig into these tricky conversations. We'll hear from folks who have really heavy flows and others who have totally irregular cycles. We'll speak to a period activist who's non-binary and trans. We'll talk to two dads who are figuring out how to support their daughter when she gets her period.

And, of course, we'll dive into common myths to find out what's rumor and what's real.

On this episode, we're talking about late bloomers and what it's like when most of your friends have gotten their periods, and you still haven't.

So, I was more of an early bloomer. I was ten when I got my first period. I remember sitting with my mom and my aunt at Junior's. It's a diner in Brooklyn, New York. They're famous for their cheesecake. So, we're eating dinner, and I remember feeling clammy. It was super uncomfortable. And, I knew it must've been my period starting, and I just didn't want to deal with that. I mean, I was ten, I was a kid. It just seemed like such a heavy thing to have to deal with.

Thinking back on it now, it seems kind of crazy to be "entering into womanhood," as people like to say, but I was still figuring out sixth grade algebra. And my own early experience has me wondering, *what's the opposite like?*

So, our producer, Mia Warren, and I sat down with a real-life late bloomer to find out.

Lola Blackman: I remember growing up and I thought 13 was the time that every single person got their period, so even if people got it before, I was like, *What?*

Narration: This is Lola. Her pronouns are she and her. She's a junior in high school, and she lives in New York City. Last year, Lola was fifteen. She still hadn't gotten her first period, but all of her friends had already gotten theirs.

Lola: So, I was definitely nervous that, *What if I just don't ever get it?* And, I think I just...was nervous maybe there was something wrong with my body.

Narration: Lola's skinny and she's small for her age. She wondered if that had something to do with it. And, the waiting? It was driving her crazy.

Lola: I think I definitely was like, *When am I going to get it? When am I going to get it? I want it, like...* And then I started really worrying, 'cause I was like, *Well, my sister got it earlier, and my mom got it earlier, like, Why am I not getting it? It should happen.*

Kamilah: Did you talk about that with your mom and your sister at the time?

Lola: Yeah.

Kamilah: So what was that like?

Lola: Definitely my mom, I was like, *I'm really nervous that I haven't gotten it.* And she was like, *Seriously, don't worry, like – it'll happen when it happens.*

Narration: But, Lola didn't believe her mom. She was still worried something was *wrong* with her. And she was feeling some serious FOMO. She noticed a kinship among her friends who had already started their periods. They enjoyed talking about it.

Lola: It just seemed like such a community to me. Like, everyone kind of has this thing in common, and they share this one thing, and, like, they get to have these conversations, about cramps and tampons and da da da da...but, like, I didn't really get that because I wasn't in on it, you know?

During a conversation, people were talking about their cramps and I was like, "Oh my god, yeah, totally," and I'm like, *Why did I just say that? I don't have my period. Like, I don't know those cramps.* I just so badly wanted to be a part of that conversation and it just did feel isolating for me not having it and stuff.

Narration: Lola says her friends probably knew she was lying, but they didn't call her out. And then, finally...

Lola: My parents were away...and one of my really good family friends was with me. I went into the bathroom, it was just like...a little bit of blood, and I was like, “Holy s***, it’s happening.” I was feeling...honestly, like relief...’cause I was like, I was such a late bloomer to everybody...so I was just really excited to get it.

Narration: Lola’s family friend bought her flowers and red cake. Some of her friends came over. They celebrated by watching the Tonys. After all that waiting, it finally happened. But, Mia and I started to wonder: Was Lola right to be worried about being a late bloomer? Is there a normal age for getting a first period? We’ll be right back with some answers.

So, Mia is here. She uses the pronouns she and her. She’s a journalist.

And, she’s good at digging into things and finding out answers to difficult questions. So, she did some research to find out more.

Mia Warren: So, in the United States, the average age to get your first period is twelve. And, for anyone who gets their period later, there’s a medical term for that: *constitutional delayed puberty*.

Kamilah: That sounds really intense. What does that mean?

Mia: Yeah, I mean, it’s basically a fancy name for someone who starts developing later than the national average age.

Kamilah: Which is twelve.

Mia: Yeah. So, it’s kind of like the official medical term for “late bloomer.” And, you know, it’s often inherited from your parents. So, if your mom got her period at 18 or if your dad was a late bloomer, it’s more likely for you to be one.

Kamilah: That wasn’t the case for Lola, though. And it wasn’t for me and my sister either.

Mia: Well, right. And that’s because it’s not just about genetics. There’s actually a lot of different things that can affect *when* you begin to go through puberty.

Kamilah: Like what?

Mia: Diet is one thing. Kids are eating different foods than they did 50 years ago, and this can affect when you start to develop. Scientists are also looking at exposure to chemicals. These can all affect when puberty begins.

Kamilah: Okay, cool.

Mia: But, here's the thing. Puberty isn't a single event like getting your first period. On average, it lasts about four and a half years. So, biologically, it can mean a lot of different things for you. It can mean developing breasts or growing pubic hair.

Kamilah: All that fun stuff.

Mia: [Laughs] Yeah. So, you know, all of this to say, the term *constitutional delayed puberty* might sound kind of technical, but it's not something to worry about. The truth is that people develop in different ways and at different rates.

Kamilah: And starting your period is just one part of the whole process.

Mia: Right. And you know, to be clear, there are other reasons you might start your period later than twelve.

Kamilah: Like if you're a serious athlete and you're burning a lot of body fat, like dancers or gymnasts. I remember when I was a dancer in high school, sometimes I'd skip my period for a month or two.

Mia: Totally. Decreased body fat can delay puberty or make you skip periods.

Kamilah: But what should someone do if they're *really* concerned about it?

Mia: I'd say just to talk to your parents or a caring adult. In most cases, it's just a matter of understanding that everyone matures a little bit differently.

Kamilah: In other words: there's nothing wrong with being a late bloomer.

Mia: Right.

Narration: When Lola finally got her period at fifteen, she realized she was a late bloomer and she was fine with that. But, when we talked, she realized something else that didn't really sit so well with her.

Lola: I just think it's just so strange, this welcoming to womanhood thing...it is...it is weird. Like, since when? I'm not a woman, I... I'm just not... I'm still a teenager, and I'm so fine being a teenager right now. I don't really need to be a woman.

Narration: That welcoming into womanhood thing? That's really typical to hear. My mom and my aunts said the same thing when I got my first period. But, let's unpack that.

So, on a biological level, getting your period means you're physically able to conceive. But, just because your body's closer to adulthood, it doesn't mean that you are.

And the truth is, a first period can cause all kinds of emotions to bubble up. Lola didn't like the way people were telling her she was suddenly a woman. And that feeling can be true for anyone going through puberty.

A first period doesn't always mark the transition from girlhood to womanhood. And that's because not everybody who gets a period identifies as female. In other words, periods aren't experienced by just girls and women.

We're going to dig into that more in another episode.

Feeling My Flo is executive produced by Mia Warren. Our sound engineer is Carolina Rodriguez. Our intern is Emma Forbes. We're produced and distributed by Lantigua Williams & Co. I'm your host, Kamilah Kashanie. Our guest is Lola Blackman. She performs with GoodCapp Arts, a theater program for teens in New York City.

You can find out more about late bloomers and resources for navigating puberty at our website, feelingmyflo.com.

Feeling My Flo is a resource to help you start important conversations at critical moments, like when you get your first period. We're here to inform, entertain, and empower. Visit us on our website and follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to join the conversation.



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