



## So You Don't Get Periods. Why Should You Care About Them?

We talk to people who don't menstruate but who understand why it matters to them. If you have anyone who menstruates in your life, this episode's for you.

**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.

There are a lot of reasons talking openly about periods can be good for everyone...whether you menstruate or not.

Hamilton Carter is a cisgender man and the father to three kids — ages nine, seven and five. His pronouns are he and him.

**Hamilton Carter:** When I was a kid, especially a younger kid, my family didn't really talk about menstruation. Um, the first I found out about it was in public schools in the fifth grade. And that was probably the extent of it. I'm not sure I ever discussed that with my mom.

**Narration:** When he was a child, Hamilton's mom had some health issues.

**Hamilton:** Growing up, what I knew about my mother's reproductive health, I found out in high school. I think she had had cysts on her ovaries for years. By the time I was in high school, she was taking hormones to try to reduce the size of the cysts.

**Narration:** An ovarian cyst is a tiny pouch that grows on or inside an ovary. Ovaries are where eggs are stored in the childbearing reproductive system.

**Hamilton:** And as a result of that she would occasionally just start to sob. Um...and so, since it was blatantly obvious that something was going on, at that point, she explained in very plain language, you know exactly what was going on. But it

was...the explanation did not come until there was actually a reason for it...to happen.

**Narration:** It's really common for menstruators to get ovarian cysts. Most of the time, they're not painful, and they usually go away on their own. But when Hamilton was 39, his mom suddenly got really sick. She was rushed to the hospital because of a problem with her lungs.

**Hamilton:** When my mom passed away, it was really a huge surprise. She was 64.

**Narration:** Hamilton says his mom died too quickly for the doctors to give an official diagnosis. But...

**Hamilton:** When she was in the hospital...they found what the doctors called fragged uterine cancer cells, which I took to mean that they weren't viable cancer cells. But they were actually in her bloodstream at that point...I definitely thought, well, gee, she's, you know, she's always had problems with her uterus and ovaries.

**Narration:** He says doctors thought maybe there was a tumor in her uterus.

**Hamilton:** It was really fast and it was really strange and we didn't see it coming. And that the uterine aspect of it is spooky for me 'cause now I have kids, um, who have uteruses.

**Narration:** Hamilton has two daughters — Hamilton Junior and Diana. They both use she/her pronouns. His son Sam is the middle child. His pronouns are he/him.

From the very beginning, Hamilton has talked to them very openly about their bodies. We asked the family to sit down together and remember the times they've talked about periods.

**Hamilton Junior:** We might've been getting Mom tampons...

**Hamilton:** We might've been, we might've been...

**Narration:** That's Hamilton talking to Hamilton Junior, his oldest. They're remembering a family camping trip from two years ago.

They were stopping for gas on their way to the campsite. Hamilton's wife, Elaine, needed tampons, so Hamilton and the kids got out of the car and went into the store.

**Hamilton:** And so we tootled in and asked, you know, 'Where do we find tampons?' And once we'd done that, you know, Hamilton immediately says, 'Well, what's a tampon?' And she had read a sex book prior to this.

**Narration:** Hamilton, the dad, had never been very satisfied with that book. He felt like it didn't talk about periods in a way he thought his kids would need to know about them. So, right there in the gas station, he took that moment to fill in the gaps.

**Hamilton:** Um, we, we did get one customer that was just like, 'Oh my God, what are you doing?'

**Narration:** Hamilton wanted his kids to understand that periods are normal. And so is talking about them.

**Hamilton:** Yeah, this is a thing...you can talk about it. It's not a big deal. It's a uterus. It's, it's something that half the population has.

**Narration:** That camping trip was the start of some important conversations for the whole family.

**Hamilton Junior:** It's blood coming out of your butt. [Laughs.]

**Narration:** That's Hamilton Junior. She's nine now.

**Hamilton:** Where's specifically? Where's the blood coming out of?

**Hamilton Junior:** Your vagina.

**Hamilton:** Okay, good good.

**Hamilton Junior:** Why do you have to be so specific about it?

**Hamilton:** Because if people thought blood was going to come out of their actual butt, but instead it came out of their vagina, they might get worried something was really, really wrong. 'Cause they're like, 'Oh my God, this was supposed to come out of my butt.'

**Elaine Carter:** And blood's never supposed to come out of your butt. That means you're going to go to a doctor.

**Hamilton:** Also true.

**Hamilton Junior:** Okay.

**Narration:** Even if all his kids won't menstruate, Hamilton wants all of them to be knowledgeable and feel comfortable talking about it.

**Hamilton Junior:** Why do people who don't have periods need to know about periods, Dad?

**Hamilton:** Um...[Laughs.] Lots of reasons so that we can go get stuff like tampons and pads for people that do. So it's not a big deal to us...So that for people who have periods, it won't be a big deal to talk about them 'cause it will be like, 'Right, right, yeah, periods,' as opposed to 'Ah, what?' So that way if you can talk about it more, you can ask help for stuff, or you can just talk about it at all. So it doesn't seem like there's a part of your life that no one talks about.

**Narration:** As a father, Hamilton says he feels particularly responsible for talking about periods. He thinks more cisgender men who don't menstruate should talk about them too.

**Hamilton:** You might wind up being your kid's only resource that can talk about it is the other thing. My dad can't tell me anything about my mom...you might be the last link this kid has to information about their health. And you might be the last person this kid has to talk to about their health or about sex or what's going on.

**Hamilton Junior:** What's the age when you start getting your periods, Dad?

**Hamilton:** Um, I don't know from experience, but, but what I'm told is it's any time between nine and 13 or 14, usually.

**Hamilton Junior:** I'm nine! Did you know that? [Laughs.]

**Hamilton:** I did know that you are nine. I was there at the birthday party! [Laughs.] I was there when you were born. I've kept track, so, yes. Yes, I did. [Laughs.]

**Narration:** In some ways, it has been easy for Hamilton to talk to his kids about periods because they are so young.

**Hamilton:** It's not an issue to them. God, I remember my dad's sex talk, it was, like, such a mess, and he was so uncomfortable and I was uncomfortable and I was probably 11 or 12 or 13, I don't know. And for these guys it's just like, 'Right. That's a thing that happens. 'Cause you said it's a thing that happens and it's a thing we talk about 'cause we talk about it.' We just have super easy conversations. It's not a big deal.

**Narration:** Hamilton could never talk to his mom so openly about things like this. Not as a kid growing up, and not as an adult when she got sick. And he doesn't want his kids to go through the same difficulties he did.

**Hamilton:** I want the kids, if they have a problem, any kind of problem, all three of them, um, with sex, genitalia, reproductive health, whatever, instead of keeping it to themselves, to come and say, 'Hey, this thing is going on.' And then we can be like, 'Oh, it's no big deal. Whatever. We'll just...off we go, we'll figure it out.'

**Narration:** People who don't get a period should care about periods because they might have a menstruator in their life who relies on them. Sometimes it's just a matter of encouragement and emotional support.

**Morgan Givens:** My name is Morgan Givens. I use he, him pronouns, and I am 33 years old.

**Narration:** Morgan met his best friend Marolyn Garo back in high school. But they're so close that he calls her his sister.

They first met in marching band. Marolyn played the flute...and Morgan played the alto sax, bass clarinet, french horn and the trumpet.

**Morgan:** And I just kinda took to her and she took to me. So we've been...God, we've been best friends for — that is so long...that's almost 20 years, so...[Laughs.]

**Narration:** Marolyn has seen Morgan through the good, the bad, and the most emotional times of his life.

**Morgan:** I am a trans man and...I take, uh, testosterone weekly and the thing testosterone does, over time...your period stops. You just don't have a period anymore.

And I remember when I first started transitioning, she was one of those people who was in my corner and had my back. Like, we just have this type of relationship where if anything ever happened, the other would always be there.

You know, my sister was like, 'Yo, you don't have a period no more. That's messed up. Like, because I still have a period, my stomach still cramps, my belly gets full and you don't have to pay the pink tax at all. You owe me a pint of ice cream. And I was like, 'What? Like, what do you mean I owe you ice cream?'

**Narration:** The pink tax is all of the money a menstruator will spend on products over their lifetime. So Morgan and Marolyn call their ice cream deal the period tax. Morgan started bringing ice cream to his sister back in 2010.

**Morgan:** And I just picked it up from the local Harris Teeter because we had weekly, uh, brother/sister dates...and once a week we would get together and watch movies, uh, grab beers, sit around the TV and just, you know, talk and get to know each other better. And I, I would bring the pint of ice cream, and she would take her pint and she wouldn't give me any, but that's okay. [Laughs.] She earned it, she deserved it.

**Narration:** Morgan met his wife Catherine in 2015. Almost a year after they first started dating, he brought Catherine home to meet his family...and she learned about the period tax.

**Morgan:** The funny thing is, she didn't think it was weird or anything. She was just like, 'Where's my ice cream?' [Laughs.] So...

**Narration:** Even though they don't live in the same city anymore, Morgan's figured out a way to keep the tradition going.

**Morgan:** And the next thing I know I'm getting taxed by my wife for a pint of ice cream a month and my sister who I have to Venmo the money to now so she can go buy her own pint because she lives down in North Carolina.

And that is me just kind of paying it forward, uh, and trying to do something for them that's nice 'cause, like, periods...they're not all that, you know they're not that great all the time, so...

**Narration:** When we spoke to Morgan, we made sure to ask the truly important questions. Like what flavors of ice cream are acceptable under the tax?

**Morgan:** My sister's favorite ice cream flavor is, anything chocolate, anything coffee in it. Though my wife, her favorite ice cream is mint chocolate chip anything. [Laughs.] She going to eat all the ice cream. I just be sitting there, like, 'Can I have a bite?' and she just be like, 'No.' So...[Laughs.]

**Narration:** I'm definitely a fan of mint chocolate chip, and I'm not alone. A 2004 study found that almost 50% of cis American women crave chocolate specifically before they get their periods.

For Morgan, supporting the women in his life is all about little gestures.

**Morgan:** So it means that grace is given and in moments when, uh, my wife sometimes gets very anxious, um, shortly before her period comes on. And I know this about her. You know, that week that her period's on, I'm going to pick up more chores around the house because you, when your period is on, you're just tired.

**Narration:** Morgan has tried to get others in his life on board with the 'tax,' but he hasn't had much luck.

**Morgan:** So most of the dudes I talked to about it, they don't really, really get it. And they think it's weird. But I'm like, are you paying attention to anything that women have to deal with? Like, bro, the least you can do is buy them some ice cream. So...yeah, they don't understand it. They don't get it. But all the women in my life think it's great. They're like, 'Yes. More ice cream taxes.' So, uh, I guess I'm on to something.

**Narration:** For the record, this isn't just talk. I know Morgan, and he really is this sweet of a person.

**Morgan:** When I see my wife or I talked to my sister and they're just like, my period is whipping my behind, you know, I, I know that maybe they might need a little more support or I check in on them just a little bit more to see if there's anything I can do or if they need anything.

I just go ahead and set that little \$12 aside because I know they're going to come calling for that Ben and Jerry. Shoot...the way ice cream costs, now I need to start setting aside a 20, but, uh, it's all good.

**Narration:** I would love someone to bring me ice cream once a month. And menstruators of any age could all use someone like Morgan, and Hamilton, to turn to when they need some extra support during their periods.

**Narration:** Feeling My Flo wants to help you start important conversations at critical moments...like when you're figuring out how you can support the menstruators in your life.

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