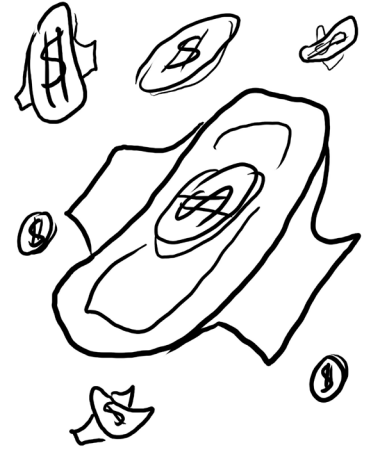


# What is "Period Poverty"?

**Period Poverty**, per the American Medical Women's Association, is defined as "the inadequate access to menstrual hygiene tools and educations, including but not limited to sanitary products, washing facilities, and waste management."\* This is a loaded definition, so let's break it down, shall we?

The word "poverty" is associated with a "poorness" in resources, the obvious resource being financial. In the U.S., six out of every ten poor adults are women; according to the Shriver Report (founded by Maria Shriver, a ground-breaking report based in research around multiple women's issues) one in every three American women lives in or on the edge of poverty.\*\* In

conjunction with this, we see an intersection in poorness in education and access to care and utilities. For menstruating people that live on or below the poverty line, something as simple and involuntary as a monthly period becomes a focal hardship.



Access to menstrual products is, first and foremost, the largest part of the period poverty pie-chart. Government-issued food stamps do not cover menstrual products. Prices, on average, can range from \$3 to \$10 for a box of disposable pads or tampons--not including tax. **"The Pink Tax"** or the **"Tampon Tax"** is the existing tax on menstrual products and is still in effect in 35 U.S. states. And this is for a NECESSARY hygienic product. Women may need between 12 and 30 disposable products for every period. There is not tax included on things like Rogain hair treatment for men or erectile dysfunction medication. All three of these are important products, but why do periods get the tax?

Menstruators have confessed the need to often choose between menstrual products and food. So what are people who can't afford period products using? Studies show that people have used rags, old clothes, toilet paper, paper towels, disposable diapers, and even shoe insoles as an alternative.\*\*\* +

Access is not just limited to lower pricing and removal of tax. Period products should also be provided for the homeless, for incarcerated peoples, and in public spaces like schools, universities, health clinics, public restrooms, workplaces, airports and train stations, and other spaces where they may be needed. It seems like a no-brainer, but this is where conversations can be started. Organize donations in places that you frequent to get others on board. Create a community around you where talking about periods is normalized.

Speaking of normalizing periods, education is another resource that continues to falter around the topic of menstruation, and not just in schools. Though it is true that many young menstruating people suffer from fear and shame surrounding their periods, society itself is to blame. Throughout history and cultures, menses have been a taboo subject, something that has to be whispered about and kept secret. Why?

Periods are natural, and even non-menstruating people should know about them. HALF OF THE POPULATION DOES IT. We fear what we don't understand. Educating all populations about menstruation helps to remove bias and discomfort around periods and simply makes for a more inclusive culture.

Our society often makes periods an isolating event. Eliminating the period-shaming stigmas and administering a well-rounded education (as well as access to additional resources and products) surrounding the realities of menstruation lessens the burden that newly menstruating and menstruating people must bear--especially for those who do not have other people in their lives that they are comfortable approaching about issues of proper hygiene. Not only that, but educating menstruators on available hygiene products and how to use them is also necessary to reduce the intimidation and hesitation that products such as tampons and menstrual cups can cause, though they might be a better fit for a person's lifestyle.

Another real area of concern for educational poverty is the workplace. Ninety percent of menstruating people suffer from cramps and other period complications.++ Some experience debilitating side-effects which cause them to have to leave work early or call off and this can affect their income as well as jeopardize their employment (YES. Periods typically happen EVERY MONTH.) Sensitivity around periods has to become an ingrained part of the workforce--allowing for paid time off, extended or additional breaks, and access to products and waste receptacles. That is an example of what equality looks like.

Short of throwing our stained absorbent products into the Boston Harbor, progress is happening... but more needs to be done (let's just not punish the fish for it, yeah?). Talk and write to your representatives, your work places, your local community centers and ask that menstrual products be provided freely to those in need. Help to organize donations to local food pantries and homeless shelters. Ask your school to set up a menstruation station. Make a pamphlet or a zine and distribute them. Let the secret out!

Citations:

\* <https://www.amwa-doc.org/period-poverty/>

\*\* [shriverreport.org](http://shriverreport.org)

\*\*\* "The Ultimate Guide to Feminine Hygiene." Duquesne University School of Nursing, 3 Dec. 2019, <https://onlinenursing.duq.edu/master-science-nursing/the-ultimate-guide-to-feminine-hygiene/#:~:text=Feminine%20hygiene%20support%20groups%20and%20organizations&text=Louis%20University%20found%20that%20women,Carroll%2C%20writing%20for%20Reuters%20Health>.

+ Moon et al. "How can we improve knowledge and perceptions of menstruation? A mixed methods research study" BMC Women's Health. (2020) 20:214. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-020-01007-4>

++ Criado Perez, Caroline. Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men. New York: Abrams Press, 2019.