

THE NEW START READING SERIES



I CALL IT THE CURSE!

a book about periods

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I CALL IT THE CURSE!

a book about periods



One day, we talked about periods
in our women's group.



Some of us were embarrassed.

Cindy:
You are not going to talk about
down there!



Donna:
My daughter is asking me
questions.
And she hasn't even started to
have periods yet.



I would die if I had to talk to her
about that stuff.



Cindy:

The first time I had my period
I did not talk to anyone.
I used rags and toilet paper.
I thought I was bleeding to death!



Anna:

My mother told me there was
nothing to worry about.
I felt really grown up,
but I did not understand my body.



Donna:
Why do we bleed, anyway?

Anna:
I have a friend who could
explain why.
Her name is Carolyn.

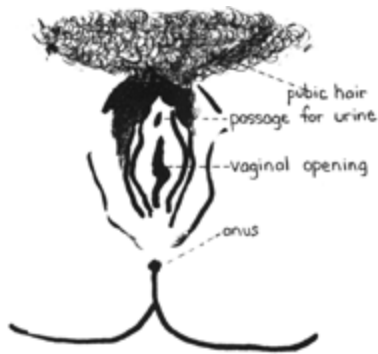


We asked Anna's friend, Carolyn,
to come and talk to us.
She works for Public Health.

Carolyn:
I know everything there is to
know about sex!

The hard copy of this story includes a picture of a woman looking at her body in a mirror which we have left out with the permission of the editors.

Carolyn showed us a picture of a woman looking at her body in a mirror.



Carolyn:

This part of the body is called the vulva.

You can see the opening to the vagina.



Carolyn:

And this is the clitoris.

It's hard to see sometimes, but it's very sensitive to touch.

Donna:

My daughter touches herself a lot.

Is that bad?



Carolyn:

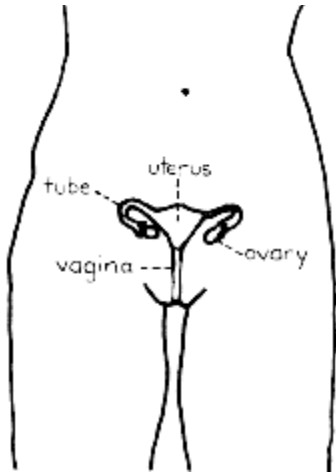
I think she is only doing what the woman in the picture is doing - finding out more about her body.



Donna:

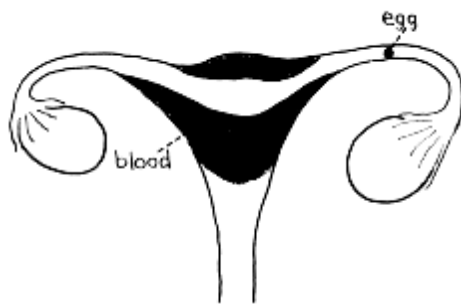
My Mum never talked to me about this stuff. She would die if she heard the word vagina!

I don't even know where the blood comes from when we have our periods.



Carolyn showed us a picture of a woman's body.

Carolyn:
We have eggs in each of our two ovaries.
And we have two tubes that lead to the uterus.



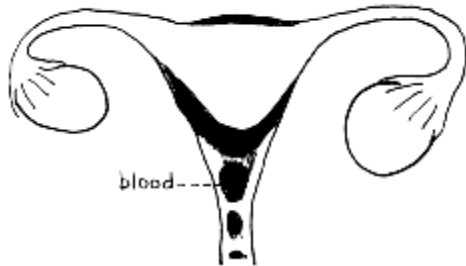
Each month, one egg leaves the ovary.
It travels through the tube to the uterus.

Rich, thick blood grows in the uterus.
If we get pregnant, the egg stays in the uterus.
The blood stays to feed the egg.



Carolyn:
Most times though
we don't get pregnant..

Donna:
It's a good thing!



Carolyn:
The blood comes out of
the uterus, through the vagina.

We call this menstruation.



Cindy:
I call it the curse!

Anna:
Is it that bad?



Cindy:
I get cramps and I feel
depressed.

Donna:
I like to take a hot bath.
And if my cramps don't hurt too
much,
I go for a walk.



Carolyn:

We menstruate about once a month.

Our periods last about five days,
We are all a little different.



Anna:

I don't have periods anymore.
It's because I went through
menopause.

Cindy:

What's that?



Anna:

It's something that happens to us when we get older.

Our periods get less and less until they stop.

For years, I had hot flashes...

Donna:

My Mum had hot flashes.

She said they were awful!



Anna:

All of a sudden I would get really hot.

I would break out in a sweat.

It was really embarrassing.



Cindy:

Do you still get hot flashes?

Anna:

No! That's all over now.
These days I feel great.



Donna:

I didn't know our bodies were so interesting.

I'm going to talk to my daughter.

I want her to understand
what is happening to her body
as she gets older.



Cindy:
You are right about that.
Talking helps me
understand my body...



But I still call it the curse!

How we made this book

It all started in a women's group meeting with Dorothy, Rose, Eileen, Sally and Vivian. Rose was telling us about pains she felt when she had sex. Sally drew a picture on the board showing the ovaries, tubes, uterus and vagina. This helped Rose see that her pains were not in her tubes, which had been "tied and burnt" many years ago. The pains were caused by a bladder infection.

Dorothy was very interested in the picture. She had just found out she was pregnant. She wrote:

It showed how the egg gets to the uterus. It shows how the sperm reaches the egg to make a baby. It was very good to know how this happens.

Rose and Dorothy had not learned about their bodies when they were growing up. We decided to write a book that would explain how our bodies work. The women we talked to wanted the book to be about many things: pregnancy, sexuality and problems with health. But we also wanted the book to be short and easy to read. We decided the book would be just about periods. It would be a beginning.

Many women worked on the book at different times: writing, editing, drawing the pictures and acting out the scenes that help tell the story. We all learned something new. We found out that each of us had her own story to tell. These all found their way into the book.

You will have your own views. We hope that this book will make it easier for you to tell your own story and share your feelings.

The New Start Reading Series is published by East End Literacy Press. The stories are written by adult learners at the Toronto East End Literacy Project and produced by volunteer tutors, adult learners and staff. The series is designed as reading material for adult learners of basic literacy and English as a second language.

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The Production Group for *I Call it the Curse!* was: Cathie Archbould, Jane Bremner, Margie Braun-Meyer (photographer), Rose Doiron, Anne Healy (assistant coordinator), Maureen Kahn, Carolyn Klopstock, Judy Kondrat (illustrator), Sally McBeth, Debbie Sims, Denitza Sims, Kay Skinner, David Smiley (photographer), Vivian Stollmeyer (coordinator), and Ruth Wehlau. Special thanks to the East End Literacy Women's Group, Betty-Ann Lloyd of the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy's Clear Language and Design Group, Margot Francis, Pixel Graphics, and the Toronto Department of Public Health.

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This book is about some of the important things women talk about at East End Literacy in Toronto, Canada. We got the idea for this book when Dorothy said: "It is good to know what happens in your body." If this book does not answer a question that you have, please visit your community health centre.