

# Bodily Listening

collected stories on menstrual pain

This project was birthed from my personal quest to heal or lessen my period pain. While being so vocal about my struggles, I've heard from countless others with similar stories, so I've decided to gather them. Some will die on the hill that our pain is normal and we should just shut up and deal with it, but we know it's our bodies trying to tell us something. Can we slow down enough to listen?

Even the word we use, 'period', implies the helplessness of patriarchal Western medicine. Period, being short for 'periodic illness,' which is how they viewed our sacred cycles. Stripped of our indigenous knowledge, a lot of us are trying to create new pathways toward collective healing.

Go submit your story, email:  
[serenacorson@gmail.com](mailto:serenacorson@gmail.com)

**My uterus is the tornado  
My clitoris is the eye  
Surrender to your demons  
But you better look alive  
Chin down, chest out  
Pout your lips, but lose your voice  
This is an order, it was never a choice  
Can't you see Our karmic links are under duress  
If not in this life, than surely the next  
You'll learn what it's like to feel the disdain  
To be misinformed on how to deal with your pain  
The aching womb of the collective screams out  
We're in an over tilled, exhausted, emotional drought  
Mother earth teaches us to set ourselves on fire  
But we see you warming your hands  
Eyes glistening with desire  
Little do you know  
Our fire comes from within  
A flame that can't be put out by distasteful men  
Spreading like wildfire  
Hand in hand  
We will prevail & reign again  
As divine, powerful, unbreakable women**

**Madison Fields ~~~~~**

**“I have a chronic illness called Pmdd that not many people even know about! It affects 3-8% of people who menstruate. I was diagnosed at the age of 21 while in college which is one the reasons why I ended up withdrawing so close to graduating. I was in college for Biology, but honestly bc of my diagnosis and mental health plus knowing deep down it wasn't for me, I withdrew and later in my life around the age of 23 found art. i knew that that was what I wanted to do. So oddly enough, my period sort of brought me to art lol. Being the pain in the ass it is (my period,) it has revealed to me so many things and healed me in so many ways. Many people with this disorder are actually trauma survivors, myself included. I have come such a long way to be able to even share these things and talk about what I thought was taboo for so long. Now, I am happy to spread awareness and speak about the uncomfortable. Pmdd is essentially an abnormal reaction to the fluctuations of hormones in the menstrual cycle. So, every month my brain & body does some whacky shit. The symptoms, for me, start about a week before my period and oddly,**

**actually start to get better once I start to menstruate. These symptoms include body fatigue, muscle soreness, brain fog, anxiety/depression, suicidal ideation, rage, and so much more. It varies person to person. With that being said, I am so happy to say that because this is something I have dealt with for a few years now, I have it so much more under control than in my teenage/early adult years and I now understand and know what to expect. Sadly, at the time I withdrew from college, I was suicidal and severely depressed because I had no clue what was going on. I felt extremely isolated and misunderstood. Also a tad crazy. I am able to cope much better now, although it is still difficult. Sometimes it makes me feel like a completely different person and its really hard to get people to understand. A lot of times I even feel invalidated because people don't seem to take it serious and think oh, its just a period. Its debilitating!**

**I hope that we as women or anyone who menstruates, can be taken serious in our troubles and I hope that education and conversations regarding this topic can become more frequent. I hope we as a society can stop shaming women/people for natural things and instead embrace how normal it is, the ugly stuff included."**

**~ anonymous ~~~~~**

**"I bled for two years straight as a teen, heavy, saw every specialist, had every kind of ultrasound (internal and external), and only was ever told "have you considered you're faking it?"**

**~ anonymous ~~~~~**

**"Most cycles are smooth for me. Some cycles start badly. Pain that builds exponentially, very slow at first, like a low uncomfortable buzz, then builds to a pulsing pain that rises and falls akin to what I imagine are labor contractions. This pain is so strong that I become nauseous, my body convulses and I start to throw up, and shortly after I am also on the toilet, while my head is over the tub. The moments where stuff is coming out of me on both sides, the squeezing of my lower body actually relieves the pain a little. I theorize that it's my body's reaction to the pain, or it's a great and violent moment of my body purging and detoxing**

**I notice that these bad beginnings of my cycle align with the months where I experienced more stress, tension, anxiety, than usual, and most importantly when I treat my diet carelessly. The week before menstruation, if I give into cravings of sweets and refined carbs without a balance of water and green vegetables, I suffer. Whether it's this painful first day, or heavier bleeding and more painful cramps throughout the week. I also find that during that first week before the period, the infamous "PMS" week, the sources of irritation and sensitivity are triggered by things that have been bothering me all month, things that I have to let go of. I consciously go through them and try my best to leave behind what I must, before my body starts removing them physically. It helps my period and it keeps the mood swings at bay in a big way.**

**I have brought the painful first days up to gynecologists and their nurses; their advice was birth control. They admitted they did not know much about the source of**

**the very painful cycles, and therefore did not know what could help relieve them, except the birth control that eliminates the bleeding altogether. Even though the medical professionals claim that the lack of a period does not affect the body, I do not believe this is true. I think that by not going through this monthly detox, one is doing a disservice to themselves: their body, their spirit, and their mind. This is a very specific cycle of the female body. It has spiritual connotations, that I do not fully know, but I feel.”**

**~ anonymous ~~~~~**

**“Early 2020, right after graduating from FSU Dec. 2019 I made the decision to go off birth control after being on it nonstop for about 4 yrs. I decided to stop taking it because of shifting personal values and beliefs surrounding birth control and because of poor mental health that was affecting my capacity to take it consistently, as directed. I’d skip multiple days at a time because I was struggling to even get out of bed and take care of myself. I could tell the inconsistency was confusing my body and making the pill ineffective so I decided there was no point in taking it anymore. A few months after stopping birth control my cycle had not returned. Flash forward 2.5 yrs... still no cycle. I saw 4 different doctors in those 2.5 years that all told me to go back on birth control. I was adamant that that wasn’t the move for me and asked for alternative ways to heal my cycle out of fear I would not be able to have kids one day. No alternative solutions were ever provided and the answer to my fear surrounding my ability to have kids was that I should take birth control until I want to have kids and then they would give me hormones to help me conceive -a “solution” I wasn’t thrilled to hear either.**

**I decided to take things into my own hands and did some research and began taking maca root powder. At first the maca did wonders! My hormone panel started looking balanced and “normal” again and I actually had a couple light periods. Doctors were amazed and inquisitive about what I was taking that was yielding those kinds of results. When I told them it was maca, not one of them knew anything about it or had even heard of it. My mind was completely and utterly blown. I thought, even if they don’t want to prescribe it they should know what it is if they work in the world of obgyn, considering a simple search on google for cycle supplements will most often return “maca” as an effective option. For the first time in my life I really truly felt like I couldn’t trust our western medicine system. I always had reservations and complaints about western medicine and big pharma, etc. but had never received advice from a doctor I didn’t trust.**

**Unfortunately, the maca did not work forever and my cycle disappeared again. A few months later I got a new job and moved to CO. I met someone through my new job that lived on a property in a converted bus that offered me a yurt for rent on the same property. I accepted the offer and moved onto the property which I soon learned was owned by a medicine man named, Gary. One weekend Gary hosted a sweat lodge on our property. I attended and prayed for the healing of my womb and cycle. After the sweat, Gary asked me to come talk to him and his wife/assistant Debby, the next day about my cycle. They started the session by checking to ensure all my chakras were open and note what direction they were spinning. (Clockwise is**

typical and counterclockwise occurs when a female is on her moon time). My chakras were all open and spinning clockwise. Then they hovered a feather above my body and moved it from my head to my toes and back up. Debby sensed an attachment on my head.

They prompted me with a few questions and told me to answer as quickly and intuitively as possible. In the end, we came to the conclusion that my mom had put a block on me from having kids out of fear and protection. Debby finished the session by slicing the “cord” with the feather and throwing it away.

The next morning, I woke up with the heaviest cycle I had in 3 yrs and I have continued to get periods every month since.”

~ anonymous ~~~~~

“Last year, after months and months of worsening cramps, I was bleeding through 7-8 super tampons a day. Like heavily bleeding, waking up in the middle of the night to change my tampon because I would soak through a pad heavy. Anyway, I broke down crying with a gynecologist and begged for an IUD. They agreed and we had the appointment and while it was uncomfy I thought the worst was over. A week later a bruise on my abdomen appeared which was alarming. Two weeks after the IUD appt, it was time for my cycle again and the cramps had gotten so severe and so painful that I lived for days on the verge of tears (or crying), screaming, and could not be away from the heating pad for more than ten minutes at a time otherwise I’d double over in pain. I called the office crying and they said it was totally normal and this would be the scenario for a few months as my body adjusted. Which is just bullshit???? I got sent home from work because I looked ill. The pain eventually decreased and I’m thankful not to have such severe cycles anymore but good lord at what fucking cost.”

- E

“Since I was 15 I have had history of major depression including multiple suicide attempts. When I was 21 I went on the pill. The first month when I got my period, I slipped into a huge depressive episode. Only then did I realize my period and depression might be connected. I looked through my medical records and realized I was on my period at the time of EVERY one of my hospitalizations. No doctor, medical or psychiatric, ever caught that pattern or even asked questions about it. Brought it up to my gyno at the time, who said PMDD “wouldn’t cause depression that severe.” Well, I haven’t attempted or been hospitalized since understanding my cycle.”

~anonymous ~~~~~

**“The day I was diagnosed with endometriosis was a relief I felt in my bones. Since the first day I got my period I knew that they were not normal. Yet when I would describe my pain or my suspicions I was always met with dismissal or told that what I was experiencing was indeed normal and I was just overreacting... I was too weak. Yet a year after I got my period (13) I broke my arm in two different places, but I didn’t cry. I just wrapped it up just so I could play in the championship game for softball. And I went a whole year with that broken arm until I accidentally broke it again one day and finally got a cast. I remember the doctor pulling me aside and pointing out that the injury was obviously old...so why hadn’t I sought out any medical attention? Because I must had been in immense pain. But I told him that it in fact it didn’t really hurt much at all and told him that my periods hurt more...which just made him laugh. And he didn’t investigate any further. For years I would just suffer in silence...occasionally showing signs to others that something was indeed wrong ,but as always each and every sign was always dismissed or laughed at. Like the time I was in so much pain I went to the bathroom just to look at myself in the mirror to keep myself from passing out from the pain...and then suddenly waking up on the bathroom floor with my little brother laughing over me. He told me that he saw me hit my neck on the tub and roll onto the ground...and all I could think in that moment was that I was lucky I was passed out or I could have broken my neck. Every doctor I would advocate for myself to would never believe my pain. I was told to change my diet...then one doctor got close to the problem when he found out I was anemic (anyone could wonder why) but again I just needed more iron. And the problem was not looked into any deeper than that. One day when I was 24. An adult now. Still undiagnosed. I was at work and suddenly my worst nightmare occurred. 30 minutes before I walked into my shift I had put on a brand new super tampon and a thick pad. 5 minutes into checking someone out at the register I started to feel lightheaded and when I looked down (I was wearing all white) there was just blood spreading down my legs I had bled completely through the tampon and pad in just 35 minutes and the lady I was ringing out just looked at me with big eyes...and god bless her soul my coworker jasmine. She quickly grabbed me and helped me to the break room. I explained to her that I shouldn’t be bleeding this much...but was interrupted by our manager calling the back room phone. When Jasmine answered he asked her where I was in which I told him that I was having a personal emergency and needed to go to the doctor. He told me I couldn’t go anywhere until I told him why...mortified and confused I told him that I was on my period and I was bleeding too much, but before I could finish he interrupted me by saying “ew so disgusting I don’t need to know that dude you can go” no empathy or care in his voice at all. Jasmine helped me to my car, then I just drove myself to the hospital. I had lost so much blood in just under an hour. The doctor there asked me if anyone had ever tested me for endometriosis, I remember crying and saying no one ever believed that my pain was real enough to be tested. When the results came back to finally prove that I wasn’t crazy or imagining anything...it was a relief I felt deep in me. Sometimes I still hear the years of laughter that always seemed to surround my pain. But my laughter always drowns them out now.”**

**- @nottobespoken**

**“I’ve had 2 copper IUDs in the past for birth control since I already have hormone issues and didn’t want to add to the mix with another hormonal birth control. Had shitty issues with them both. The first one gave me horrible periods, I already had irregular bleeding prior to getting it put in but afterwards it just got so much worse. I would bleed for 3 weeks without end and then have a 4 month break and then randomly spot for a day or two and then have another horrible period. The cycle repeated. Also, on the first one, I wasn’t able to have penetrative sex because it was so incredibly painful anytime my partner got even close to my cervix (which happened to be often because of his size lol). I ended up getting it taken out because they thought it might have been inserted wrong, but not before having to have an exploratory diagnostic endoscopy to see if there were any other issues other than the IUD. I got the first one taken out in case it was inserted wrong and had them reinsert a new one that same day (horribly painful btw, do not recommend two of those procedures at the same time). The new one was fine for a couple of months, and then suddenly my periods started getting violently heavy, horribly crampy to the point where I had to call in sick several days each cycle. Finally, one day I was on the toilet cramping and pushing out thick blood clots and the entire IUD just ripped out of me and fell into the toilet water. It literally just fell out of me. Since it’s been gone, I haven’t had pain. It’s so sad, because I’m awful at taking pills (and wanted to avoid hormones at all) and I wish I could have the IUD for convenience but either my doctors are just fucking incompetent and couldn’t place them right or my body is just doomed to reject them. Either way, horribly painful, long experience”**

**~anonymous ~~~~~**

**“I have something called a micro adenoma on my pituitary gland (that’s the gland in your brain that controls hormone regulation). It’s just a tiny benign tumor that basically just messes with your hormone production. Essentially my prolactin is like sky rocketing compared to what a normal woman would experience. Because of this I experience things like hair loss and severe PMS before my cycle as well as very very low libido and irregular spotting. My doctor and gyno tried to prescribe me birth control, which helped with the spotting I guess? It basically made me have no period at all. But....I’ve kinda ended up going my own route. After reading about natural ways to approach a problem like this I’ve resulted to not being on BC (big pharma is just not my thing, although i truly believe everyone should.... make their own decisions for themselves) and I’ve started seed cycling as well as eating a diet that is more in sync with my menstrual cycle. As well as taking some supplements along the way. This has really really benefited me! And I’m happy I followed my own path! I’ve experienced less hair loss and less spotting, as well as a leveled out libido. It’s been a long journey of almost a year, and I’m finally starting to feel like myself again. I think that a lot of women really don’t know how much they’re influenced by their hormones, because of lack of education really.” ~anonymous**

**“I've had severe pelvic pain since I got a copper IUD in 2017. I kept that sucker in for 4 years because I thought it might get better on its own. It didn't. I lost so much sleep waking up every hour to writhe in pain every night for 2 weeks out of every month. It was miserable, a nightmare. I dated a man who would get annoyed when I would curl up in the fetal position after sex. He thought I was being dramatic and it bothered him.**

**Anyway, so I got the copper bastard taken out and replaced with Mirena. No periods, pain was better, so that's cool, but it didn't go away. I still lost sleep, couldn't have sex sometimes because it hurt so badly afterward, pounded ibuprofen like it was my job. Fucking sucked. I decided to take it to an OB because I wanted to advocate for my health. They told me I should get a laparoscopy to see if I have endometriosis. They made it sound very casual - 2 week recovery and then I'll be fine. Worst decision of my life.**

**I got the laparoscopy right before going on a big old trip. I had a lot of places to be. Seattle and then Leavenworth and then Boston. Fun! Yeah, so I had the surgery and they gave me oxycontin and so I thought I was fine. I felt great for 5 days until the drugs wore off and then I was in the worst pain I'd ever been in my life, in Seattle, the day of the Wu Tang show, with 5 people that I didn't know that well, so I had to hang. The day was terrible. I would have literally sucked a stranger's dick for a free trip to the ER. Ibuprofen, 20 minutes later tylenol, 20 minutes later ibuprofen, just to keep up. You get the idea.**

**When I got through that day and that trip, I figured the worst was behind me. Nope. Pain of that level came back with a vengeance every month since then. My body stopped being able to keep up. I've vomited in so many random parking lots and establishments at this point, I've cried and punched walls and screamed. Called into work and canceled plans with friends. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy!!! (read that again in my pirate voice please)**

**There's a happy ending to this story. I reached out to a hippie woman and ordered some THC vagina suppositories as kind of a hail mary effort, and you know what, those little shits worked!! I'm fine again for**



**the first time, and thank God because I just started grad school and was going to have to drop out if it didn't get better. I'll totally send you her info if you wanna try. Saved my fucking life."**

**~anonymous ~~~~~**

**"I've had irregular (super long) periods since 8th grade, went on hormonal birth control at age 13 (I regret this). when i first tried going off of the pill around age 20, I got depressed and had horrible acne and my hair fell out, so i went back on it. then when i switched to IUD in my 20s, and had to get it replaced after 3 years, it took 20 minutes of the most painful poking and proding to try and re-insert into my tilted uterus until I finally had to ask them to stop because I couldn't take the pain anymore. I opted for the Nexplanon implant instead, but fainted. I wish menstruation didn't have this stigma, and that research prioritized understanding periods instead of putting everyone on the pill as an answer to any "problem."**

**~anonymous ~~~~~**

**"About 3 or 4 years ago I was sent to a rehab behavioral center where they gave me an antipsychotic that forced me to stay dissociated and fucked with my cycle. While in the center someone gave me a pill that made me pass out and I was raped in my room and when I woke up I was in full blown psychosis trying to kill people so the center baker acted me. While I was baker acted they kept me in a holding cell for 24 hours before my 72 hours even started...and they refused to give me any of the medication I had been on and I went through a hard withdrawal that lasted until after I had gotten back home. I called my family desperate for help, all the centers they'd been sending me to I was getting abused at and I opened up about fear of abuse from my grandfather. The family that raised me decided to cut me off for it. I remember finally coming home being in the bathtub and hallucinating the entire lifecycle of a plastic sex doll and repeatedly telling my bf at the time I hated him. Literally the worst moment of my life. It wasn't until after I'd come back to reality that I got my period again and now**

**every time Ill go through mild psychosis during my cycle and often forget I have it.”**

**~anonymous ~~~~~**