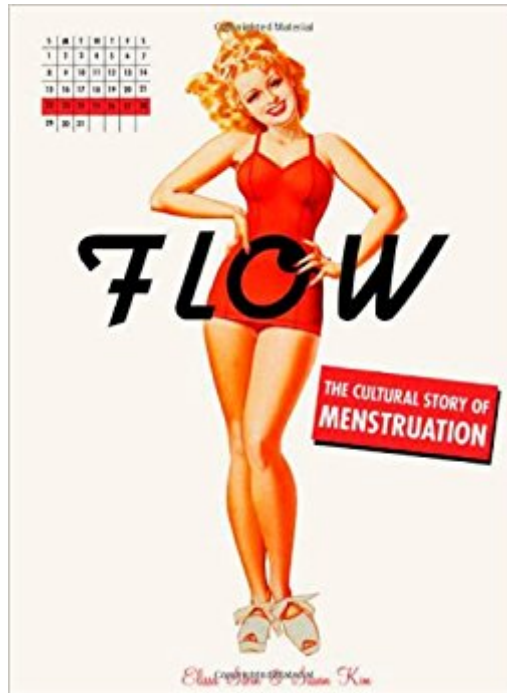




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# Flow: The Cultural Story Of Menstruation



## Synopsis

In this hip, hilarious and truly eye-opening cultural history, menstruation is talked about as never before. Flow spans its fascinating, occasionally wacky and sometimes downright scary story: from mikvahs (ritual cleansing baths) to menopause, hysteria to hysterectomies—•not to mention the Pill, cramps, the history of underwear, and the movie about puberty they showed you in 5th grade. Flow answers such questions as: What’s the point of getting a period? What did women do before pads and tampons? What about new drugs that promise to end periods—a hot idea or not? Sex during your period: gross or a turn-on? And what’s normal, anyway? With color reproductions of (campy) historical ads and early (excruciating) femcare devices, it also provides a fascinating (and mind-boggling) gallery of this complex, personal and uniquely female process. As irreverent as it is informative, Flow gives an everyday occurrence its true props and eradicates the stigma placed on it for centuries.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Written like a sassy young women’s magazine with first-person narrative and the occasional astonished exclamation point, a normally taboo topic claims attention with the surprising-and sometimes horrifying-history of cultural reactions to menstruation (Pliny believed menstrual blood was toxic to flora and fauna), feminine "hygiene," and the enticing yet under-researched future of period-free birth control methods. Sprinkled throughout with entertainingly naïve ads from each era of the 20th-century as well as many references to scientific findings, author and graphic

designer Stein and Kim, a graphic novelist (Circle of Spies) and writer of the play adaptation of *The Joy Luck Club*, evoke a light-hearted tone about their serious subject. They cover everything from menarche to menopause, including what menstruation is (which receives an outstandingly clear explanation) plus an enlightening discussion of the pad v. tampon debate, which at bottom was a sophisticated marketing strategy. Perfect for a preteen's introduction to adulthood and for women of all ages, this is guaranteed to spark conversation about old early sanitary technology (belts and pins), the pad's evolution, during WWI, when nurses found cellulose bandages more absorbent than plain cotton, and whether this universal female experience is a blessing, a curse-or just part of life. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

**\*Starred Review\*** Stein and Kim wonder whether, in all of human history, anything else has been so reviled, so honored, so fear-inspiring, so mysterious (even to its hostesses), or so marketable as menstruation. Throughout millennia, the monthly act of shedding blood has stymied everyone from religious leaders to philosophers to physicians and scientists. Until the Industrial Revolution, that is, when feminine-care marketers began hauling in carloads of profits on the strength of proving to women that their monthly body function needed this gizmo or that potion, all the while referring to menstruation only in the most oblique terms—all that even a sumptuary society allowed. But at long last, along have come these two women to give us as plain-speaking, comprehensive, and witty a compendium of menarcheal information and reference as we've ever had. There is probably no better book for moms who want their daughters to respect themselves in every aspect, and for female preteens and teens who would never say a word about their moms reading a book about menses but surely would like several sneak peeks into its pages. One can only ask Stein and Kim, What took you so long? --Donna Chavez

This is a fantastic book on many many levels. Elissa Stein and Susan Kim take on the discomfort of discussing "that time of month," talk about the awkwardness and then examine menstruation in a way that is sharp, smart, serious, laugh-out-loud funny, respectful, irreverent and best of all, friendly. It's not a science book, but it's not supposed to be one, but as a 40year old dude, I know a lot more about what goes on every 28 days today than I did before reading this book. They look at the crazy misbeliefs about menstruation throughout history... crazy and still relevant today - some of Pliny the Elder's hypotheses and attitudes about the subject can still be found today, to some extent. In the context of the mysterious uterus (once believed to be a hamster-sized organ that travelled all over the body), they look at PMS, and medical treatments for "womens problems" including the doctor

treating "hysteria" with "hysterical paroxysm" (including some involving water jets that today would be blocked by Net Nanny). It's not all fun and games, though, because the treatments also include hysterectomies and the fatal results of hormone-replacement therapy for post-menopausal women (once believed to be a benefit, the human trial of hormone treatments was stopped in 2002 when it turned out to significantly increase health problems across the board). My favorite favorite favorite parts of this book discuss the role of marketing and advertisements for feminine products and how these have "educated" us over the years. Commercials with mysterious blue liquids! White swimsuits and beach images! The book is filled with gorgeous copies of print advertisements from the last century, from when Kotex was first advertised (convenient way to sell off bandage material from WWI), to images of freedom and freshness (white swimsuits and all) from the 70's and 80's to today. These are fascinating to see, especially with Stein and Kim discussing these ads and the attitudes of the times. As something that really should be in a note for the paperback edition, when Apple's iPad was announced, the internet exploded with menstrual humor, but most hilarious of all was the official demo video that practically, unintentionally use much of the imagery from the last few decades of femcare advertising. I guess the marketing guys at Apple never paid attention to those campaigns. Fantastic book - five stars. Really, it's a must-read, an excellent excellent book.

Interesting, informative, and a fun read.

Very enjoyable book- fun to read and illustrated with sometimes terrifying old ads for menstruation products. I got a kick out of the conversational tone of the book. However, it could have included more information regarding what is 'normal' in menstruation, to demystify some of the process. All in all it was a fun and informative read. I would recommend it for an older teen or young woman who may still be confused about the process. I would not recommend it for a young girl at her menarche- she'd be better served by a copy of "Our Bodies, Our Selves."

Should be called Flow: Some Historical Tidbits Interspersed with Ranting Plus More Information About the Mechanics of Menstruation and Menopause Than Should Really Be Included. Although the book starts out with the promised historical content, it quickly shifts into blaming men for the existence of everything from sexism to PMS, saying that women would never start wars, and preaching at the reader. It's chock-full of statements like "We're not saying that PMS doesn't exist" (after pages of saying PMS was made up by evil male doctors) and "We're not saying you have to enjoy menopause" (after pages of making one feel bad about even considering hormone

replacement therapy.)For \$14 on the Kindle, I could have bought ten much better books. This is a rip-off and makes me want to stand barefoot in a kitchen somewhere, just to be irksome.

This book showed me things I never knew before. It has a lot of history and business information of the menstruation products. I love how it talked about women in other cultures and how much importance they put on the time of the month. Beautiful Job.

I loved this book. I learned A LOT about myself, my body, and history. It's a fun, hilarious, informative read that assures you that you're not alone in loving/hating/feeling confused about your period. My favorite parts were the slang we use for periods and the history. As I was reading this book, I was also taking an American Literature class and there was a surprising amount of material that linked between the stories and poems required in the class and Flow. (Such as The Yellow Wallpaper and the history of hysteria.) This book doesn't shame women for not loving their "heavenly ruby goddess river" and it doesn't shame women FOR loving it either. We all have different experiences with our bodies and they're all legitimate. Great read. Totally recommend it for all women, and men too.

Very informative but entertaining!! I just loved the old advertisements for feminine products! Still not sure what to do about feminine product waste?? Tampons without applicators, reusable homemade pads.....makes you think!

This book is one of the first to openly discuss what most western women are thinking while on their periods. It was very informative and well written. My only disappointment was that there were a few subjects (such as sex during flow) that were broached but not discussed.

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