

Menstruation

Description: An in depth lesson pertaining to Muslim women on the Islamic regulations legislated for them with regards to the three types of bleeding they experience. The rulings explained are significant as they deal with other important aspects of worship.

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Objectives

- To distinguish between menstruation, postpartum bleeding and abnormal bleeding.
- To learn the forbidden and permissible acts for women on period or post-childbirth bleeding.
- To learn how to know the end of period and about the discharge after period.

Arabic Terms

- *Ghusl* - ritual bath.
- *Fajr, Dhuhr, Asr, Maghrib, Isha* - the names of five daily prayers in Islam.
- *Rakah* - unit of prayer.
- *Du'a* - supplication, prayer, asking Allah for something.
- *Dhikr* - (plural: *adhkar*) remembrance of Allah.
- *Ramadan* - The ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is the month in which the obligatory fasting has been prescribed.

Introduction

There are special regulations in Islam legislated for women regarding the three types of bleeding they experience, that are menses, postpartum bleeding, and abnormal bleeding. Women must understand the rulings pertinent to each type, as they deal with important aspects of worship, such as purification, prayer and fasting. This lesson will try to explain the most important rulings relevant to each type of bleeding.

Menstruation

Menstruation is the release of blood and tissue through the vagina that occurs on a

monthly cycle, not due to specific events such as birth or breakage of the hymen. Menstrual periods usually occur once a month and last for several days. Blood loss due to menstrual flow may vary from month to month. Women typically use sanitary napkins (pads) or tampons to absorb menstrual flow. Menstrual blood is almost always dark color and not bright.

Post-Childbirth bleeding

Such bleeding occurs after the event of birth or miscarriage. It has no minimum duration, but it may even last up to forty days. Umm Salamah said:

“During the lifetime of the Prophet, the post-childbirth woman would seclude herself for forty days.” (*al-Bukhari*)

A woman experiencing post-childbirth bleeding has to stop praying for forty days unless her bleeding stops before that. If her bleeding stops before that time, she is to perform *ghusl* (ritual bath) and start praying. If she sees blood after forty days, most scholars say that she is not to stop praying. The blood of postpartum bleeding is also almost always dark.

Forbidden Acts

Divine wisdom has exempted women from certain religious duties due to various reasons associated with bleeding. The following is a list of acts which are forbidden during menstruation and post-childbirth bleeding:

(1) Formal Prayer (*Salah*)

A woman experiencing her period or post-childbirth bleeding is not to perform her prayers, whether obligatory or voluntary, and those prayers which are missed due to this reason are not to be made up at a later time.

If her blood flow starts after the time for a certain prayer begins, for example, half an hour after the time for *Dhuhr* prayer, then, after her bleeding ends, she should make up that *Dhuhr* prayer, since she was pure when the prayer became obligatory upon her. She should not, however, make up the prayers she missed while she is bleeding.[\[1\]](#)

If there is enough time left to pray at least one *rakah* (unit of prayer) after performing the ritual bath, she should pray that prayer, because the Prophet said:

“Whoever catches with one unit of prayer (*rakah*) before the sun rises has caught the *Fajr* prayer, and whoever catches with one *rakah* before the sun sets has caught the *Asr* prayer.” (*Saheeh al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*)

Example: if she performs the ritual bath after the completion of her bleeding at the time of *Asr* and there is enough time left before sunset for her to pray one *rakah*, then she should pray *Asr*.

(2) Fasting

It is forbidden for a woman experiencing menstruation or postpartum bleeding to fast, whether it be for *Ramadan* or voluntarily, but unlike the formal prayers she must make up the missed days of *Ramadan*.

(3) Sexual intercourse

It is forbidden to have sexual intercourse while a woman is menstruating or experiencing postpartum bleeding, although other types of intimacy are allowed. As for anal intercourse, it is forbidden at all times. The Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, was asked "What is it permissible for me to do with my wife when she is menstruating?" He said:

"Do as you wish except for sexual intercourse." (*Muslim*)

(4) Touching a copy of the Quran

It is forbidden to touch a copy of the Quran when one is in any state of impurity, because Allah says:

"... which none can touch except the purified." (Quran 56:79)

The Prophet told the people of Yemen:

"No one should touch the Quran except one who is pure." (*Malik, an-Nasa'i, Ibn Hibbaan, al-Bayhaqi*)

Permissible Acts

- (1) reciting the Quran from memory.
- (2) *Du'a* (supplication).
- (3) engaging in *adhkar*: remembering Allah with specific words like *Subhan-Allah, Allahu Akbar*, and others.
- (4) reading books of hadeeth or any other Islamic books.

One should keep in mind that it is permissible to read and touch a translation of the Quran, as it is not the word of Allah but rather a translation of its meanings, even if it has Arabic in it.

End of Menstruation

A woman can know that her bleeding has ended by two things:

1. The white discharge that indicates the bleeding is over.

2. Complete dryness if a woman does not have this white discharge. In this case she can find out if her bleeding has ended by inserting a piece of white cotton or something similar; if it comes out clean, then her bleeding is over. If the cloth comes out red, yellow or brown, her bleeding has not ended.

A woman must perform the ritual bath after her bleeding ends before she may pray, make up her fasts, or resume sexual relationship with her husband. She may bathe during her bleeding, but here we are referring to a separate ritual bath (*ghusl*) which must be performed at the end of the bleeding in order for a person to resume worship.

Drops of Blood after a Woman Has Purified Herself

Umm 'Atiyyah said: "We used to not regard the yellowish and brownish discharge after the white discharge indicating that the period is over as being of any significance." Based on this, this brownish discharge that comes before the period is not part of the period, especially if it comes before the usual time of menstruation and there are no other signs of menstruation such as cramps, backache, etc. So it is better for her to make up the prayers that she missed during this time.

If the period of a woman ends and she sees the white discharge which signals that her period has indeed ended, then any brownish or yellowish discharge that she sees after that, or any drops or wetness, is not menses, so it does not prevent her from praying, fasting or having intercourse with her husband. But she should not rush until she has seen that she is pure, because some women, when the bleeding lessens, rush to bathe before seeing the white discharge.

Also if a woman has a regular cycle of a certain number of days, any blood seen after that is considered false menstruation, and she should perform the ritual bath and pray, even if she does not see any white discharge. Any abnormal bleeding is also considered false menstruation.

Endnotes:

[1] The Prophet said, "... when she is menstruating she does not pray or fast." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*)

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