F: Today is August 27, 2025 at 5:53 p.m. and this is focus group 30-02. Before we begin, I want to help our minds think creatively and openly. Because we're not sharing our names or personal information I have one question to start off with to get to know each other a little bit. What animal do you most relate to, and why would you select that animal? Today I'm going to say a duck, because I really like to be on the water, but also want to come back to the land. Anyone else want to start us off? Ava.

Ava: Alpaca. They're social creatures, and they're very friendly, very sassy, and I love them so much. I've visited some alpaca farms on my birthday for the last few years. They're funny and friendly, and they get lonely if they're by themselves. (Laughs.)

F: (1:45) Chris, what about you?

Chris: A koala. That was the first thing that came to my mind. I feel like they just want to chill and be soft and cuddly. (Laughter.) I don't relate to them constantly eating things that are horrible for them (Laughter) and poisoning themselves with eucalyptus, but I do relate to finding something they enjoy and really sticking to it. Yes, they just sleep all the time. They just want to live their life. I like it. (Laughter.)

F: (2:25) Ivy, what comes to mind.

Ivy: Probably a coyote because they are not super social creatures, but they do need a pack to survive. (Laughter.)

Amelia: I don't know, maybe a fish. I don't know why. (Laughter.)

F: (2:53) And Lily?

Lily: I'd say my dog because he likes to be cozy, eat good food, and go on walks. (Laughter.)

F: (3:05) Thank you. We're very happy that you could be part of our discussion today. For the rest of the discussion today we're going to talk about menstrual cycles. People sometimes use different words when talking about the menstrual cycle or the days of the month where they are bleeding. What are some of the words that you use? Feel free to raise your hand.

Ivy: Period.

F: (3:32) Anything else? Lily, yes?

Lily: Period too.

F: (3:33) Ava?

Ava: Bleeding. Bleeding. Very much, just straight out.

Lily: Spotting.

F: (3:44) Thanks, Lily. Other words that maybe you don't use but you know people use? Chris?

Chris: I sometimes use it, and I feel like I'm always wrong when I say it, but I always joke, I'm like, "My luteal phase," because sounds really, really, like, "Oohhh" (said with a mystical tone). (Laughter.) I'm like, "My luteal phase is upon me." (Laughter.) That's how I warn my husband. I'm like, "I'm cranky right now, and I think it's my luteal phase."

Ava: Yeah, it's just my luteal phase. (Laughter.) I love it, I love it.

Amelia: It's an old term. An older or, like, midwestern term of "on the rag".

Ava: I was going to say that. (Others agreeing.)

F: (4:37) How do people usually keep track of their menstrual cycles to know when they might be bleeding again? Either ways that you keep track or ways that you're aware of. Chris?

Chris: I have an app on my phone that I log how heavy my periods are and when I have my period, and it alerts me a few days before. It's like, "Your period is on the way," or it tells me, "Your ovulation cycle is in a few days." It has logging of other symptoms, and what you did. That helps me keep track, because otherwise time flies, and I'm like, "Oh no, it's upon me again." (Laughter.)

F: (5:19) What are some other ways? Ivy.

Ivy: I try to do apps, but then I always fail at updating them, so it doesn't count my cycle, but I usually do it by feeling. If I'm feeling.... There's a cycle of how my body is feeling. There will be a couple days when I feel really hot, really good looking. And I'm like "I'm fertile then." (Laughter.)

Ava: Very expansive.

Ivy: Yeah. And then I'll feel like my acne will start coming on and, kind of, greasy, and that's usually like, "Oh God, the period is starting."

Chris: I would say that's also what I do. I will often, then it will prompt me to check my app. I am noticing certain symptoms like that. For me, I get really intense, like, anger beforehand. I'm just mad at everybody and annoyed. (Laughter.) And I'm like, "Why is everybody so annoying right now? Why is the world so frustrating?" Then I'm like, "Huh," and I check my---

Ava: Why is everybody stupid?

Chris: Yeah, like four days before usually. So, I would say, yeah, body is another...

F: (6:35) Anything else, anything over here?

Lily: I have a hard time keeping track, also because it's inconsistent. Should I keep track of this?

F: Thanks, Lily.

Chris: I have one more. It's weird. Because I have really heavy cycles, I have a specific sheet, a black sheet that I use for my period. So, I use that for that week just in case I breakthrough bleed. So, I will change my sheets every week, and then I realize. I'm like, "Oh, I changed it three times." And now this next week is coming up, and it's like, "I have to bring the black sheet back in." That's my weird, "Oh, I know that it's coming Because it's time for the black sheet."

Ava: Heard that. Heard that, yes. Absolutely. I was going to say, I used to use period apps until data privacy started becoming more of a concern. First of all, I'm not of an age where tracking my periods really... It's more for me, rather than family planning or something like that, or whatever would be the concern. Now, I'm just not going to put that personal data... You know what I'm saying. I'm not going to put that personal data where somebody is going to be like, "Oh, you searched for this, or you did this, and so on and so forth. Why aren't you, you know, having a child?"

F: (8:22) Thank you, Ava. Just so we're all on the same page for the rest of the discussion, when I say menstrual cycle I'm talking about the monthly cycles that people who menstruate have. This

includes the days of the month when you are bleeding, the time just before you bleed, the time just after bleeding and all the other times in between.

Ava: So, we just live in a menstrual cycle? (Laughter.) It's a menstrual world. We're just living in it. (Laughter, agreement.)

F: (8:58) Any questions about... All good? Now I would like you to think about how your own menstrual cycles have changed while using contraception, both changes that you have liked and changes that you have not liked. First, I'll have you raise your hand. Please tell me about any ways contraception has changed how often you have bleeding? How often you have bleeding. Ava.

Ava: This is actually one of the reasons why I went on a birth control plan, was to try to regulate my hormones. I don't know, it does seem to have—it's kind of hard to tell—it does seem to have slowed down things. I don't know how to explain it. My cycle was a little bit frequent, basically. Then it seems to have slowed that down a little bit. And, I forgot… if this is of interest to you.

F: (10:20) Yeah, and we can come back around, too. Lily, did you have your hand out?

Lily: Yes, I would say for me it changed the amount of bleeding, and then it increased the amount of spotting throughout.

F: (10:38) What do others think, how often? Changes in how often you have bleeding?

Ivy: The period of bleeding is longer now for me. It used to be a solid three days, I was in the clear, and that was it. Now it's like the whole seven days. It's a five day difference.

Chris: The same for me. The amount that comes out of my body, the frequency... (Ivy agrees) Frequency as far as it happening every month regularly, because other birth controls were a lot less. I was more likely to spot and have less frequent or less predictable periods. Then also the frequency of, like, it lasts sometimes nine days, which is brutal.

Ava: That's a long time.**(11:36) With the same consistency or the same intensity?**

Chris: No. There are three or four days of really bad in the middle, and then I feel like there are a few days that lead up, and then there's the petering off period, but I feel like on either side gets longer. It's more time that I have to be thinking about, "Got to wear the black underwear," kind of thing.

F: (12:06) Amelia, do you have any thoughts on how often?

Amelia: Yes, sure. It's done everything for me. At some points, I wouldn't have a period for a year or two. (Ava: Agh! [gasp in surprise]) And then other times, I'd be going through irregular spotting for a month or more. So, just ir-reg-u-lar-ity in general.

F: (12:29) Now I want you to tell me any ways contraception has changed how regularly you have bleeding. (Ava: Laughter.) That's a good segue. Amelia, do you want to say any more about that?

Amelia: IR-regular… Yeah.

F: What do others say?

Ava: I want to know what you did that kept you from bleeding for a year. (Laughter.)

Lily: Me too! (Laughter.)

F: (12:53) We're talking about changes to how regularly. Yes, Chris?

Chris: I'm on the copper IUD, so I don't have any hormones. So, because of that I do have really regular cycles, pretty predictable, which in that way, it's nice. Where on hormones, I often didn't know when that was going to happen. So, the regularity changed with that.

F: (13:23) Other thoughts? Ivy?

Ivy: I'm on the copper IUD. It's made my symptoms regular. It's made them more intense, but it's like clockwork. Whereas before I had a short three-day period, but whether I got cramps or not was, kind of, a toss-up. Now it's like, "There will be cramps at this time." (said in an announcer's tone)

Chris: You know more of what to expect.

F: (13:49) Ava, what were you going to say?

Ava: Yes, it's wild to hear from y'all about this, because I had just a lifetime of crippling periods. Extreme, very heavy bleeding, extreme pain. I didn't know that this wasn't normal until I talked to some friends in the last few years. I went through a whole lifetime of this, which is why I sought out hormonal birth control, to help temper these symptoms. Now, it's more like... It's weird. I don't really know (chuckles) when I'm getting my period anymore. I don't know, it's six of one... Should I get hammered with the knowledge that I'm getting a period, or should I just guess that it's going to happen? I don't know. That's where I'm at right now.

Lily: I agree with what Ava said. It happens, but it's irregular, but it's light though.

F: (15:19) Thanks, Lily. (Laughter.)

Ava: Yeah, it's like a little, "Oh, okay." It's changing up one thing for the other. Now I've just got to guess, like you said. I'm just going to wear dark underwear 24/7, I guess, and be prepared for something.

F: (15:45) I have another question for you. Now I want you to tell me about the ways contraception has changed how long you have bleeding. Yes, Ivy.

Ivy: It's extended.

F: Extended, okay. And Chris?

Chris: Seven to nine days.

F: (16:04) Ava, any thoughts on how long?

Ava: My periods have really lessened in intensity and in, I think length, but definitely in intensity. It sucks in a way because I've talked to trans friends who are like, "Yes, we don't get the mmm (gesturing), but we get the symptoms." I feel like that's where I am, where I don't get a lot of the... I almost wish I could get that "ugh", (gesturing bearing down) that purge feeling, but it's not like that. It's more like I'll get a little bit of bleeding for a couple--- I'll get enough bleeding for a few days where it ruins my sex plans. (Laughs.)

F: (17:04) Other thoughts on how long things go on? Yes, Lily?

Lily: I would say it extends it up to a week.

F: (17:18) Thanks Lily. Now I'm curious, when you have bleeding how has contraception changed how much you bleed? The amount of blood. Any changes to report there? Chris?

Chris: It was so much blood. I'm on iron supplements. (Others slight gasp in surprise, sympathy) It's pretty brutal. I know that is something my doctor warned me about when I went on the copper IUD. She said, "Oh, well, you do get really heavy bleeding," (said with warning tone). And that is definitely the case. On my worst days I have a cup and period panties, and sometimes I bleed through that. It's pretty intense. So, it's a lot. (Laughter.) It's a lot, a lot.

Ava: Since you've had the...

Chris: Yes, since I got the copper IUD, it started. I don't know why it does that, but it's bad.

Ava: Woah! That is crazy—

F: Other thoughts? Ivy?

Ivy: Mine is definitely heavier now too.

Ava: You have a copper IUD too? (Ivy nods) Oh, my god.

F: (18:37) Other thoughts? Yes? Amelia.

Amelia: Just to offer a contrary lens for this moment. Mine has been lighter I guess, or normal.

F: (18:51) Lighter than before contraception?

Amelia: Yes.

Lily: I will say it's also lighter than before contraception. Much lighter. I just use a panty liner.

F: (19:05) Now I want you to think about how your bleeding looks. Has contraception changed the way that the blood looks? (Ava: Hmm) Chris, were you going to say something?

Chris: Yes. When I was on hormonal birth control, which I was on from the age of 15 to my early 20s, I feel like I had a lot more brown spotting and not the bright, fresh blood look. With the copper IUD, I definitely have, like, it's really bright and it's not as... Every once in a while it can be clotty, but not that much. It's a lot more of an actual blood.

F: (19:55) Other thoughts on how the blood looks? Ivy?

Ivy: Same. I keep echoing what you're saying (referring to Chris). But same here, where I think it's more like clots, because it's dark black. You know, when blood is fresh, I think. You know, before when it hits the air. Beforehand, it was just a lot lighter or sometimes brown and light.

Amelia: Pink, yeah.

Ava: Yeah, I definitely feel that, where, it's a weird… I don't want to say weird, but yes, it's a different… It's not the fresh blood that you are used to. With spotting or something like that, it's almost like it has been stored, or something. Yeah, I think of it as retroactive blood. I don't know. That doesn't make any sense, but yeah.

F: (21:02) Final thoughts on how the blood looks? Anything else to add? Yes, Lily?

Lily: It's lighter in consistency.

F: (21:13) Now, can you tell me how contraception has changed your menstrual cramps? (Laughter) I'll have you raise their hands again. Let me start over here. Thoughts here on cramps? Yes, Lily?

Lily: With this (referring to contraception), I don't have cramps. So, I don't know if I can answer that. I cramped before contraception, slightly, but I never had severe cramps.

F: (21:39) Amelia, did you have any?

Amelia: Sure, even just recently I got an IUD, and I'm currently experiencing cramps, but I don't think they changed much from my period before. Well, I guess also, I found medication that works to help deal with it. I don't think it changed too much of my cramping.

F: (22:06) Other thoughts on cramping over here? Ivy?

Ivy: When I started the copper IUD, it got really severe. The cramps were so debilitating for a couple years, I think. Now, I think I'm, kind of, more baseline. I don't know. I still have more cramps than I did before the IUD.

F: (22:31) Chris?

Chris: Mine is the same. When I first got it, there were times I had to pull over when I was driving and literally just double over and just scream. Sometimes at work, I'd have to go and lay in the fetal position in the other room for a minute. And a lot more cramps, like, in my butt (laughs). I've noticed there's just a lot more sensations in all parts of my nethers than there was before.

F: (23:05) Ava, do you have anything to add?

Ava: I would have killed myself (laughs, referring to what Chris described). I had such extreme—I already had severe pain and cramping and stuff, which is why I went on. Since then, it's weird. Like I said, I almost sometimes wish that I could just, "ugh" (gesturing, bearing down), get it out, but it's not a… I'll feel weird, and I'll feel this lower belly pain or ache for a day or two, or something like that, and I'll wonder what the hell is going on, and then I'll start spotting or something like that, and be like, "Oh, okay." Like I said, this is where I feel empathy with my trans folks. It's sort of a semi-period, or something like that, but it's not a 'one-and-done' like it used to be. Now, it's just an ache and pain and lower back pain and belly pain and whatever. Then, something happens with the spotting, and then I figure out what it is, and then it moves on. But it's like that for a day or two.

F: (24:30) While you've been sharing your experiences, (notetaker names) have been noting them on cards to help us remember them. I'm going to come over here and put them on the wall and then we'll review and talk about them.

Respondent: I didn't even notice (referring to notetakers taking notes while Ps were speaking.)

F: (24:58) First we talked about how often, and we heard: irregular, a lot less often, sometimes, more frequency, longer now, frequent cycles, and slowed down**. When we talked about how regular, we heard:** unpredictable, have to guess when bleeding will start, very regular without hormones, regular cycles, and irregular**. Then we talked about how the blood looks:** Lighter consistency, dark black, looks stored or retroactive blood, more clots, brown spotting, more bright red blood, and less bright red.

Then, how much, we heard: lighter, so much blood, much lighter, heavy bleeding, bleeding through cup and period underwear sometimes. **For how long:** Extends up to a week, seven to nine days, less length, extended, bleeding for a few days**. Then for menstrual cramps, we heard:** aches and lower abdominal pain, sensation throughout the pelvic region, similar to before, debilitating cramps, severe cramping for a couple of years, and no cramping**. I'll give you a moment to take all of this in, and then let me know, what did we miss or are there other things that you want to add to any of these categories?** (26:46-27:00 Silence while Ps read over cards and think.) **Yes, Ivy?**

Ivy: I don't know if this goes with the menstrual cramps, or how regular… But it feels sometimes like the cramps are almost like contractions and then I will be... It will be pretty regular, and come in those waves.

Ava: Since you've had the IUD?

Ivy: Since the IUD, yes.

Ava: Interesting.

F: (27:28) Any other ways that contraception has changed your menstrual cycle that we haven't noted? (pause)

Ivy: I feel like it's just, like, the other symptoms that come along with a menstrual cycle, like the very stereotypical symptoms of fatigue and bloating and feeling really hungry, and just wanting to lay down and do nothing and just being irritable, I feel like that increased when I stopped having hormones.

F: (28:16) Yes, Amelia?

Amelia: And PMS is so, I don't know, stigmatized. I don't know if you'd call it that nowadays. Like it's used as an excuse or is an insult sometimes, it like, "Oh, you're just PMS-ing that's why you're so angry" and whatever.

Respondents: Yeah!

Ava: Yes, and it's harder to tell that if you're not having regular cycles. I'll be like, "Why am I…? Ohhhh, I see. That's why, the last week, I was super mad, and everything was terrible," and then I'm like, "Oh, okay." Without having a regular purge cycle kind of thing, I don't know that until it's after the fact, and that kind of thing.

F: (29:09) We've touched on this already, but now I want to have you talk about how these changes make your body feel. Changes to your menstrual cycle, how do they make your body feel?

Ava: Bad.

F: (29:26) Bad, thanks, Ava.

Ava: Just Bad.

F: (29:34) Feeling better or worse? Chris, what are we thinking?

Chris: Just not great. I don't know if it's because of bloating, and I'm also more inclined to eat salty snacks. I feel like when I'm on my period, I have a lower sense of self-esteem. I just feel really heavy in a way that I… Like clothes don't fit the same because you are holding more fluids. So, I don't know, an

emotional part to it. Lower self-esteem.

F: (30:16) Other thoughts on bloating, heavy? Yes, Ivy?

Ivy: I think definitely lower self-esteem during the cycle part, but I also love the copper IUD at the same time. It makes me very regular. It's dependable, and I don't have to think about it. My body also feels relieved at the same time.

F: (30:41) Relief. Yes, Chris.

Chris: I second that. I also like the regularity of it. It gives me an ease of mind because I have been on birth control before that did not… I didn't have a period for months and I'm like, "Am I pregnant? Is this just the hormones?" I also like that I can predict, like "I'm feeling a little off. What's going on? Oh, it's my period." And I can know when that's going to happen. I can even plan things around it sometimes.

F: (31:23) Final thoughts on how it made your body feel? Anything else come to mind? (Lily and Amelia shaking heads, indicating 'no')

Ava: I think that really is an important thing, is when you're connecting mental health with your bodily experience, and things are going crazy one week, like, "Why is everything so terrible," and so on. Then you can actually connect the two with what's going on with your body like, "Oh." It's a relief. If you don't have those purge cycles, it can get a little bit confusing. And like I said, my cycles have flattened out to where it's not like "wa-wa-wa" (gestures up and down), but it's more like, "eh" (gestures flat line). So, it's kind of a blessing and a curse, I guess. But also, we do go through so much, you know? That, yeah, it's a new awareness, is what I'm trying to say. It's a new bodily awareness that, it's a little bit weird, honestly.

F: (32:37) Thanks Ava. Yes, Chris.

Chris: Migraines. I definitely feel like because the cramps are more intense, it puts more of a pressure on my spine, and it goes up into my jaw, and I clench my jaw more, and then I get migraines. So, it's like… yeah.

F: (32:54) Now I want you to think about how these menstrual changes have impacted your day-to-day life. Raise your hands, again. Ava?

Ava: Yes, underwear. If I'm feeling a little like, "I don't know." Again, because I don't have the really marked onset of, "I'm about to bleed," or something like that. I've kind of learned that it will be like, "I feel really weird," or something like that, black underwear. Yes, underwear choice and also maybe warning a potential partner. Something like that, I'd be like, "Yes, this is…"

F: (33:45) Anything you avoid doing or how it has affected your personal life, things like that, day-to-day? Chris?

Chris: I have to spend a lot of money on period underwear and reusable pads, because I'm trying to be good for the environment, because if I used disposable ones, the amount I would go through is insane. A lot of money on those.

F: (34:14) Any thoughts over here? Yes, Lily?

Lily: It's been just buying the pantyliners, less thicker pads and tampons.

Ava: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Amelia: Yes, I think the money aspect is horribly annoying. (others agreeing) In my experience, it could be so irregular and it could be for a long duration… Umm, I lost my train of thought.

F: (34:48) The money?

Amelia: Yes.

F: (34:50) Ivy?

Ivy: The money. I buy—I make sure that there's never not any pads, tampons, or pantyliners in the house. Like I have Amazon regularly delivering these things.

Ava: The subscription.

Ivy: Yes, because it is more regular. And also, it has regulated my sex life, too, with my partner. I also don't worry anymore. Like when I was on the pill, I always was scared of missing a day or something, and then Plan B was way more part of my life. I haven't used Plan B in, I don't know how long.

F: (35:35) Once again, while we've been talking, (notetaker names) have been taking notes on cards to help us remember. We're going to add two more columns to our rainbow wall right here.

Respondents: They've been furiously writing. You guys have been writing like crazy.

F: (35:59) First, I have how these changes have made your body feel, and we heard: migraines, irritable, bloating, fatigue, hunger, eases mind, relief, lower self-esteem, heavy, and angry. (Laughter) **Then we talked about impact on life:** Less worry, it's more annoying, have to buy products more regularly, more money on pantyliners, impacts your underwear choice, more of a hassle, and spend lots of money on menstrual products. **Are there any more we need to add over here to how your body feels and impact on life? Yes, Amelia?**

Amelia: Under "the body feels", other physical things are the boob problem.

Chris: Yes!

Amelia: That can go with the heaviness.

F: (37:09) Can you say more about "the boob problem"? (laughter)

Amelia: The pain of the boobs and the tenderness and the heavy feeling of the breast general area.

Ava: The constant---

Amelia: Yeah. Also, how the body-mind feels can be really confusing, also.

F: (37:29) Anything else you want to add? Ivy?

Ivy: For "How the body feels", this is two sides of the spectrum, but greasy. I feel greasy, like dirty. (others agreeing.) And then, there is a period where I feel super hot in the cycle (Laughter.)

Ava: Yes, exactly. Yes, it's either one or the other. It's like, "Yeah, I'm banging," or, "Ohhh, God."

F: (37:58) Chris?

Chris: One positive that going on the copper IUD had for me is that my libido was more regulated. Where when I was on hormones, I really didn't have one. That did change. That was a nice positive to see.

Ivy: Same. My libido is great. Yeah. (Laughter.)

F: (37:53) Amelia?

Amelia: I would say "impact on life" too, when I've had more irregular times, it will… Like going to the doctor or the OB/GYN. Just that care of my... That's also where I get my PAP smear and my breast exam or whatever.

Ava: (38:44) So, like being invested in your healthcare in one aspect actually---

Amelia: Yeah, yeah. It just put it back on the radar of things to do. (Ava: Ohh, that's cool)

F: (38:53) Lily, do you want to add anything else, or are you good?

Lily: For me, libido dropped, where it's hard to access sometimes.

F: (39:05) We're going to leave these up here and move onto another activity that we're going to do together. Over here, I have pictures of the body. We're going to be placing stickers that are different colors on the body in places where you experience menstrual cramps. [Notetaker name] is going to help us out with the stickers, and I'll explain. First, let us have people who are using pills come and grab the yellow stickers, and put the yellow stickers anywhere on the body, both the front and the back, where you feel menstrual cramps. We're going to be just getting up and putting stickers on. We've got yellow stickers for pills. (no one.) Next, come and get a green sticker if you're using injections. This is also if you've used them in the past. We're going to use green stickers for injectable, on the body, anywhere that you have experienced menstrual cramping.

Amelia: Is the pills one for in the past as well?

F: (40:41) Yes, yellow for pills, and then blue for implants. Then non-hormonal copper IUD, grab purple. You can get up and stick them on while I'm talking here. Red for hormonal IUD, and then orange for any other hormonal method. Let me know if you need me to repeat, otherwise, just grab… Yes.

Respondent: I was just going to ask, menstrual cramps I feel like is a very defined area. It's just where you feel pain?

F: (41:23) However you… Yes, yes. You're telling us where.

Respondent: Even if it did not change from using contraceptive versus using---

F: (41:36) The method that you're using now or have used in the past. Any cramping.

Respondent: Even if it didn't change…?

Respondent: If someone has already put---

F: (41:53) Put them on.

Respondent: Multiple...

F: (41:53) Yes, just stack them on then.

Respondent: Did you say red was---

F: (41:59) Red is hormonal IUD. Purple is non-hormonal or copper IUD. Blue is implant. Yellow is pills. Green, injectable. Orange is any other hormonal method.

Respondent: Blue was injections, like Depo or something?

F: (42:42) Yes. (pause) Sorry, blue is implant. Green is---

Respondent: Yes.

(42:54-43:08 Silence.)

F: (43:08) While we're finishing up with the colored stickers, we're going to come grab one last sticker, and that is a gold star. ("Oohh", laughter.) This time, I want you to take one gold star, place your one star anywhere on the body, front or back, where the menstrual cramps bother you the most. Just one sticker, although, if it's two sides of the body, you can do two, but one placement. Gold star---

Respondent: They're so tiny.

F: (43:41) Where the cramps bother you the most. (pause) Did everyone get their stars up?

Respondent: It's like a reverse class project. We put our stars up there.

F: (44:33) We've got a lot of places on the body to talk about. I'm going to go over them, and I'm also going to move us along so that we can hear from everybody. First, I see some stickers up here. Did someone put their stickers up here? What are some words that you would use to describe this part of the body?

Respondent: Your head? (laughter.)

F: (45:02) Yes, someone put stickers… Yes, what were you thinking when you put stickers there?

Chris: Just headaches, migraines, a dull, achey feeling, sometimes on one side or across the whole head.

Ava (45:22) Like scalp, forehead, or---

Respondent: Yes, just kind of that. It depends on the month.

F: (45:28) Anything to add? Anyone else?

Ivy: I should put mine—because I have migraines normally. But I think I get more cluster headaches, so I should put them between the eyes.

F: (45:47) We could put the name of the area. What about this part of the body here? What are some words that you would use to describe--

Lily: Tender

F: (45:59) First, we're just naming this part of the body.

Lily: Breast.

F: (46:02) Breast, yes. Anything other--

Chris: Boobs.

F: (46:07) Boobs.

Ava: Nipples.

F: (46:14) Can someone who put their sticker on this part of the body tell me about your experience? Lily?

Lily: It feels tender, sensitive to the touch, and just walking around, I feel sensitivity.

F: (46:32) Anyone else? Chris?

Chris: Yes, I have a lot of nipple sensitivity. To the point where sometimes putting on a bra or putting on a shirt can be really uncomfortable, and it makes sex like, “Don’t touch me there.” (Laughter.)

F: (46:50) Anything else for this area?

Amelia: Heavy.

Ava: Heaviness. Yes, heaviness, yes. I don’t know. I feel like I need to tighten my bra up a little bit more or just generally… I don’t want my boobs to drop as much because it just pulls.

F: (47:13) I can see one gold star here. Someone who put a gold star here, can you tell me why the menstrual cramping here bothers you the most? What came to mind when you were putting that star up? Lily.

Lily: I put it there because I just feel a sensitive sensation while I’m living my day-to-day life. It's just in the background.

F: (47:41) Now, let’s move onto this area where we have a lot of stickers over here. What are some words that you’d use to call this part of the body?

Ivy: My ovaries.

F: (47:52) Ovaries. Other words?

Chris: Abdomen.

F: (47:55) Abdomen.

Ava: Belly.

F: (47:57) Belly?

F: (48:00) Amelia?

Amelia: Uterus.

F: (48:02) Uterus.

Amelia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

F: (48:06) Someone who put their sticker here, what was that experience like?

Ava: Not crippling like they were before. I used to have cramps where I would crawl across the floor on my hands and knees and dry heave into the toilet because the pain would just take my breath away. This is why I sought hormonal birth control as therapy for this for mitigation of this. Now it's sort of this dull… it's dull. It has not gone away entirely, but it's much less and it's dull. It's this dull like, "uhhh." It's like if you pulled a muscle or something, but it's not the overwhelming, I can't breathe, kind of feeling.

F: (49:13) Thanks, Ava. Chris?

Chris: Sharp. Really sharp, like stabbing.

Ava: Really?

Ivy: Stabbing.

F: (49:19) Stabbing. Ivy says stabbing. Now I see some gold stars in this area. Someone that put a gold star in this area, tell me, why does this bother you the most? What came to mind? Anyone? Ivy?

Ivy: I was really torn between this and the breasts because they both suck. But this will take my breath away. I just feel like the breast I can get through, but this, I will be holding… in the fetal position (gestured doubling over). Sometimes it can make me sick, too. Yes, I just feel gross.

F: (50:03) Any other gold star… Yes, Amelia?

Amelia: I'll often talk about like it's a pain I can't ever get used to. It's the kind of pain that I cannot be distracted from, even if I'm working. (others agreeing.) It'll still be there.

F: (50:23) I see one sticker here. What words would you use to describe this?

Chris: Your inner-thigh.

F: (50:29) Yes, tell me.

Chris: When I first got my copper IUD, the pain was so intense that I would have shooting pain down my leg. Yes, that was intense. Every once in a while I get that, still. It's not as intense, but it's still there.

F: (50:47) Now we're going to move to the back of the body. Are we going to call this all one area? (referring to all the stickers on the back body map; Ps shake heads 'no') No, so let's start with the top half of this area. What are some words that you would use to describe this upper---

Ava: The lower back.

F: (51:04) The lower back, Ava, yes. Ivy, lower back?

Ivy: The small of my back, I wouldn't go that high.

F: (51:11) Someone who put stickers in the low back, small of the back, can you tell me what your experience is like with those cramps? Lily?

Lily: An ache, like a backache that persists.

F: (51:28) Other thoughts?

Ivy: Deep, a deep pain.

F: (51:34) Thanks, Ivy.

Ava: Like you don't know what you did wrong, but there's something that feels wrong.

F: (51:40) Thanks, Ava.

Chris: Yes, tight. It feels really tight. It's almost like it's pulling your back, and it's heavy.

F: (51:51) Then, this area of the body. What are words that we're using to--

Respondent: Your butt.

Chris: Literally, your butthole.

Respondent: Yes, butthole. (Agreement, laughter.)

F: (52:06) Can someone who put their stickers in this area tell me about your experience with cramps there?

Ava: Pooping, so much pooping. It feels like a constant wanting or feeling like you need to poop, even when you just pooped a couple hours ago. It's like, "Can I just get this feeling over with," kind of feeling.

F: (52:34) Thanks, Ava. Chris?

Chris: Like a sharp shooting pain straight up your butthole, and it will take over at any given time, and it's like, I will be in the middle of a conversation and all of a sudden, I'm like, "Oh, my God!" And my husband is like, "Are you okay?" And it's like, "It's my butthole." It's like you can't do anything when it's happening.

Ava: Oh, my god (said with a sympathetic tone)

F: (52:55) Yeah, Ivy

Ivy: It's infrequent, not regular like the cramps. (Chris agreeing) Like the front the cramps, but it is, you can't talk through it, and it feels like shooting.

F: (53:13) Then the same gold star question. That was Chris. Yes, do you want to add to what you've---

Chris: Like Ivy was saying, even though it's infrequent—so, I have front cramps a lot more—the butthole cramps are so intense and so sudden. There's no lead up to it. You know, like for your uterus, you can tell that something is coming, but for the butthole, it's just there, and it's horrifying.

Ivy: Like wasabi.

Chris: Yeah! Oh, my god! That's it! (Laughing.)

Ava: I'm so sorry. That's horrible!

F: (53:52) Now, I would like to--

Ava: We need to talk about these things because otherwise we're just like, "Oh, everybody…" (said with a lackadaisical tone) No, It's support!

F: (54:05) Yeah. I want to hear a little bit about how you manage your menstrual cramps.

Ivy: Ibuprofen.

Ava: Wine and red meat. Seriously, iron. Iron is a big thing. I usually lose so much blood, so much blood, that I get weak. I get anemic. So, sources of iron and also just hot water bottles, but I need one… The first day is really hard, and then once I get past that. Black towels, black underwear, iron, ibuprofen, movies, weed, just taking a day off from things.

F: (55:05) Let's hear from some other folks. How do you, this side of the room, manage your menstrual cramps?

Amelia: Prescription medications and non-prescription supplements or substances in general.

F: (55:25) Thanks, Amelia. Lily?

Lily: Things, again, like a hot bath or ask my partner to massage my lower back.

F: (55:32) Yeah. Chris?

Chris: I found that CBD edibles can be helpful with a little bit of THC. A heating pad for my lower back. (**Ava**: A compress.) Sometimes, ibuprofen. I've also used—they have a TENS unit that's specifically for menstrual cramps. I've used that when it's really, really bad, and that helps to get through the really intense waves.

F: (56:02) Ivy?

Ivy: Midol, ibuprofen, and then for headaches, I do triptans (referring to a class of migraine medication).

F: (56:12) We've talked about this a little bit over here, but I want to hear a little bit about having reduced menstrual cramping and pain while using contraception. Does anyone want to say more about that? I know Ava has talked about that quite a bit. Less cramping? More cramping?

Lily: I think, for me, it took away the cramp feeling in the abdominal area, and it just went to different areas. It just felt less intense. The intensity of it.

F: (56:50) Yeah, thanks Lily.

Ivy: The intensity increased for me.

F: (56:53) It increased Thanks, Ivy. We're going to leave the body maps up here for the rest of the time. I'm going to move on to our next set of questions. I want you all to look back now at the ways that contraception has changed your menstrual cycles on our wall, and then also, look at the places that you have experienced cramping. What information did you get from the clinic or your healthcare provider about these changes to your menstrual cycle before you started using the method that you're using? Considering all of these changes and all of these experiences, what information did you get from your provider or your clinic? Yes, Ivy?

Ivy: That it might be worse. That the periods might be heavier for a little while, but not the—I didn't get enough information. Yeah, that it was possible to be worse.

F: (58:09) Chris?

Chris: I feel like my provider was actually trying to steer me away from it. She was like, "Oh, I have a lot

of people complain about the heaviness of your periods and how much cramping there is." And I still wanted to go ahead with it because I had some failures with all these other hormonal options, but I felt like she was very much like, "Oh, yeah. A lot of people don't like this because of that."

F: (58:33) Was that helpful?

Chris: No, because it was something I wanted to do. Every other option I had—like, hormones just don't react with my body well. I had super weird periods, I had really intense emotional changes, and I was trying to convey that. They were like, "You should do a hormonal IUD." I was like, "Well, the whole point is I want to see what my body does without the hormones." They were really just trying to just be like, "I wouldn't do it, but if you want it…"

F: (59:09) Other thoughts on the information that you got.

Lily: I was told with Nexplanon, you have a lot of spotting, irregular spotting, and that can be annoying, and that is true. It has been convenient, but it's something that I weighed, like "Is it worth it?"

F: (59:35) Any other thoughts on information that you got and information specific to the changes that we're talking about?

Ava: I really was not really expecting to have these semi-periods. I'm on Nexplanon, too, and I didn't really expect it to be this… It was sort of like throwing a blanket over everything, where it just dampened things, but didn't really... Now, I just don't know when I'm going to have a period, or if it's a period, or what's going on. Yeah, it's a toss up. It's like, yeah, it takes things down, to a certain extent, but it's not necessarily always a good thing because like I said, I don't really know what's going on all the time. It's just like, "Ehh" (expression of uncertainty).

F: (60:40) Did you get information from your health provider or clinic on that?

Ava: Yes and no. Basically, they were like, "Yes, you might have some spotting, or something like that," but what's really happening with me is that it's not… I don't know how to describe it. It's like the spotting is the period, rather than a period, period. Yes, it doesn't cycle through like it normally would and that's where I was like, "I wasn't really expecting this."

F: (61:17) Thanks, Ava. Chris?

Chris: I feel like, when I had a follow up with my providers, and I told them about how I have really intense periods, nobody asked any questions about what that meant or how much I'm bleeding. It doesn't seem like there is a lot of detail that is requested, and I have heard stories of people who have not had those questions asked and they find out there are problems later, which makes me paranoid. I wish they asked those questions more. Like, "How much are you bleeding? What are your symptoms of that?" I do feel like there is a dismissal. Like, "Well, you're on the copper IUD. You bleed a lot." "Well, how much is normal?"

Ivy: It's an expected normal.

Chris: Yes, it's an expected normal, and it feels like I don't have… Sure, I was expecting a lot, but should my cramps be this heavy? Should I be having shooting pain down my leg? Should I be having these things?" It does feel like there's just an umbrella, like "Well, you have this copper IUD, and so every bad thing that's happening to you is that, and we're not going to explore that."

F: (62:26) Any other thoughts on the information that… Yes, Amelia?

Amelia: Since I sought out contraception for the purpose of stopping menstrual cycles, I guess my providers were optimistic that it would lower all of these categories, I guess, except for menstrual cramps for the IUD, which is an expected thing because there's a foreign thing in your uterus. Yes, so that's what they told me about.

F: (63:03) Now, thinking about all the things that we've talked about today, what do you wish they had told you more about, about these changes, before you had started?

Ava: I definitely wish that somebody had told me that I would have these semi-periods. They were like, "You might have some…" Obviously, I wanted to have lessening of bleeding and cramping and stuff. But I wish somebody had told me that I can't necessarily predict… I haven't really tried to, I probably should, but it's not a regular… How do I say... You don't really know when you're going to ruin your underwear or whatever. It's not as trackable as it used to be. It's not as defined as it used to be, in other words.

F: (64:05) Thank you, Ava. Chris?

Chris: I wish they had, instead of just saying, "Oh, well, you're just going to have heavy periods and you're just going to have a lot of cramping," I wish that there would have been a little bit more of an expectation of, "When is this something you should think about asking your doctor about? Here are ways you can mitigate those things," because it almost felt like because I was choosing a birth control that comes along with maybe worse side effects, it's like, "Well, that's your punishment." That's what it felt like, "Well, that's just what happens." It was like, "Couldn't you give me a little bit of guidance to, is this normal? What's not normal? When should I seek out something else? What can I use to help for that?"

F: (64:55) Thanks for sharing that. Ivy?

Ivy: I feel like in birth control or just reproductive care, there's this expected norm of, "My cramps are worse than they used to be," or, "My cramps are really bad." What's really bad? We said that, but I wish that, number one, that expected norm is defined. Whether it's like a Likert scale or something. Like, "I'm a five," when usually people are a one.

Ava: A standardized measurement.

Ivy: Yes, if there was just a more standardized way to see how much worse it can get, or how much I deviated.

Chris: Yeah, because at the doctor, they always ask you, if you're in pain. Like "Oh, I broke my ankle," they're like, "What's your pain scale one through 10," but I've never been asked that about my period. I've never had any doctor inquire, "What's your pain scale at your worst on your menstrual cycle?"

Ava: That's a really good point, yes.

F: (65:57) Any other thoughts? Things that you wish they had told you?

Lily: The frequency of the spotting, and are there any supplements to reduce it?

F: (66:13) Thanks, Lily. What is the most important information that you would want a friend to know about these changes before starting contraception? Yes, Ivy?

Ivy: The periods do get worse, but they also get better with some time.

F: (66:34) Something you would want a friend to know. The most important thing you would want a friend to know.

Lily: You bleed less.

F: (66:46) You bleed less? Thanks, Lily.

Ava: You bleed a lot less.

F: (66:51) You bleed a lot less? Thanks, Ava.

Ava: Yeah, it might be less predictable, but I think part of what just makes it unpredictable is that I'm not going through horrendous, every 25 days or something like that. It does make it better.

F: (67:08) What else do you want to add?

Chris: It's a toss up between, your periods will be a lot heavier, and you will have really intense cramping, which one of those is more inconvenient than the other, but I'm not sure which one. I'm on the fence.

F: (67:26) Amelia, do you have any thoughts on what you would want a friend to know about the changes? It's fine if you want to pass.

Amelia: I don't know how to word this, but when to think about seeking out other options or replacements for that option.

F: (67:50) We are going to do one last activity. For this final activity, we're going to talk about two questions that healthcare providers or researchers sometimes ask about your menstrual cycle. I'm going to ask each question, and then we'll take a few minutes to discuss. First question, when you last had a period, would you describe it as light, moderate, or heavy? First, please raise your hand if you would say light. We have Lily, Amelia, and Ava, light. If you would say heavy… (Chris: What… Heavy compared to before?**) You've got to just answer the question, and then we'll talk about it. So, if you would say heavy? And the rest of you, you'd say moderate. So, we have Chris heavy and Ivy moderate. How did you decide on your answer. Raise hands here, and one from each group at least. Ivy, how did you decide to say moderate?**

Ivy: Because I'm comparing it to other periods on this birth control.

F: (69:41) Chris, what about you? How did you come up with that answer?

Chris: I just thought about the one I had most recently, and I was like, "That's like all the other ones," and I would say it's really heavy. I guess I would categorize that as something that if I have to change the cup multiple times a day and also change period panties multiple times a day, I would categorize that as heavy.

F: (70:09) Then for the light, how did you decide?

Ava: Yes, if I can wear a pantyliner all day long, that kind of thing. If I don't need more than one tampon in a day.

F: (70:32) Others? Your thoughts here?

Lily: Same for the panty liner, mostly that.

F: (70:41) How long ago was the period that you were thinking about when you answered the question? Can you raise your hand if it was within the last month or two? We have everyone. Now, was there anything about this question that made it difficult to answer? Let's hear some thoughts there. Ivy?

Ivy: Because I don't know what the norm is or what we're comparing to. (others agreeing)

F: (71:14) Chris?

Chris: Yes, without any sort of example, like "three tampons," I don't know what that means. There's no perspective.

Respondent: Yes.

F: (71:29) Amelia, what were you going to say?

Amelia: Are we describing how much or how long?

F: (77:38) Anything else?

Lily: I think it leaves out spotting. Does that count?

F: (71:44) Yes. We're going to keep our groups in mind and answer the next question. Sometimes healthcare providers or researchers may ask you, on the heaviest day of your last period, how many menstrual pads, tampons, or other materials did you need to use to collect or absorb your bleeding for that day? Please raise your hand if you used one.

Chris: One what? (laughter)

F: (72:31) On the heaviest day of your last period, how many pads, tampons, or other materials did you need to use to collect or absorb your bleeding for that day? (Chris put their chin on their hand) Raise your hand if you used one. We're going to just answer and then we'll talk about it. We've got Amelia and Ava saying one. Two, three, or four?

Ava: At least one.

F: (73:09) We're going to just use--- So, you're not in the---

Ava: I'm in the two, three, or four, yes.

F: (73:15) So, we've got Ava and Lily in two, three, or four. What about five, six, or seven?

Ivy: Me.

F: (73:22) Ivy is in five, six, seven. Eight, nine or 10?

Chris: Oh, I think I was in the five, six, seven.

F: (73:30) The five, six, seven?

Chris: Eight? I don't know; it's a really big gap. (laughter) Yeah, sure (referring to 5-7).

F: (73:38) Did we get everybody, you're one, two-three-four, five-six-seven?

Chris: No, I changed mine, sorry. The one after that. I did the math.

F: (73:51) You're in the eight, nine, 10?

Chris: Yes.

F: (73:53) Chris is an eight. Given that we're the light group here, why do you think that people in your group had different answers to that second question?

Amelia: Different materials used.

Lily: Different contraceptives that we use.

Ava: Also, are we talking about regular or heavy absorbency materials, whatever, like super tampons. Do you know what I mean?

F: (74:39) Yes. That's a great segue into our next question, which is, was there anything about the second question that made it difficult to answer?

All: Yes, a lot!

F: (74:55) Ava was saying what kind of tampons are we talking about?

Ava: Yes, exactly. What absorbency, because you can have three or four different kinds of absorbencies and whatever, and pads or cups. I have a friend who use them, but yes.

F: (75:14) Chris, did you want to add to that?

Chris: Yes, I had a really challenging time because I often will use period panties, and I was trying to think about what the website says. I was like, "I think it holds two tampons," and I go through that in an hour, and I went through four pairs that one day. (Other: Holy shit.) Then I also think about at night, where I have to use a super pad, and I'm like, "How much is the super pad?" and "Does the night count as the day?" What is the span of time that we're talking about because if it's starting in the morning to then the next morning, it's a lot, or if it's starting in the morning until before I go to bed, it's not as much. What are---

Ava: Yes.

F: Yeah. Ivy, did you…?

Ivy: The absorbency thing, and then also I will use two things at once, like a pantyliner and a tampon, but I don't always go through both. I don't leak into the pantyliner. And then sometimes at night, I'll wear a pad, and I'm barely bleed, or something. You know? It's so varied.

Ava: Yes.

F: (76:20) Yeah. How about over here? (said to Amelia and Lily) Anything about this question that made it difficult to answer? Anything that hasn't been said that you want to add?

Lily: Nothing.

F: (76:34) Okay. Sometimes people have a very small amount of bleeding and they may not even use a menstrual pad, tampon, pantyliner, or other material. What words would you use to describe this very small amount of bleeding?

Ivy: Lucky. (Laughter.)

F: Ivy said, “Lucky.”

Chris: How about spotting?

Ava: That's spotting.

F: (76:54) Chris, Ava spotting? Anything else? What does spotting mean to you?

Lily: Bleeding.

Amelia: Light bleeding.

Lily: Yeah.

Ava: Trace bleeding.

F: (77:04) Trace bleeding.

Ivy: Pre-bleeding.

F: (77:10) How do you know when you have spotting or pre-bleeding?

Lily: I mean, you see it. (Laughter.)

Ava: You wipe.

Lily: You see it on your underwear.

Ava: Yeah, you’re like, “Ah, nuts.”

Amelia: The color thing. The fact that it’s brown. (others agreeing.)

Ava: Yes, when you go to pee and you’re like, “I either have a damn UTI or I’m spotting.” (laughs)

F: (77:41) If you just had spotting, how would you answer the second question? (pause)

Ava: Well, is that the heaviest…

Ivy: …day of the spotting? (others agreeing.)

Ava: It's like, “Oh, okay, if that's the heaviest day is spotting,” I guess, if that's your range.

F: (78:09) Yeah, Amelia?

Amelia: Also, if it's barely distinguishable, how are you... (laughs) Like, are you calling that your cycle, your last period?

Ava: Yeah.

F: (78:27) Yeah. Final thoughts on these two questions? We’re going to leave them here. Chris?

Chris: (Sigh) I mean, there are just so many, so many different materials out there to collect menstrual blood that they need to be in a category of their own. And there’s no streamlined, just like pant sizes, there are no rules for that. There are no rules for, like “How big is this menstrual cup?” I don’t know how much blood it actually holds. Without anything being consistent, I don’t know how anybody can truthfully

answer that question.

Ava: Yes.

F: (79:18) You have all been very helpful in telling us about these questions. We're moving along, getting towards the end here. In this next section, I have just two questions and we're going to talk about sex and sexual relationships, but I want to restate what I said at the beginning, and acknowledge that this can be a sensitive or uncomfortable topic for some, especially in a setting where we don't know each other well. You do not need to share anything that you're not comfortable with. You can also step out for this section, and we can also skip this section altogether. I want to just check in. Go on with the two questions?

Respondent: Yes.

Amelia: Can I use the restroom?

F: (80:04) Absolutely.

Amelia: Right now?

F: (80:07) Yes, absolutely. It's down the hall and to the right. Otherwise, okay if I ask these questions? Again, we can skip them or go quickly through them.

Respondent: Okay.

F: (80:19) Sometimes healthcare providers or researchers want to know about whether or not you had sex recently. For some people, this is a sensitive topic they don't like to talk about. How would you like to be asked if you had sex or not?

Ava: Huh…

Ivy: If I've ever had sex? Or when I last did?

F: (80:49) If you had sex recently.

Ivy: "Have you had sex recently?"

F: (80:54) You just want to be asked, just like that?

Ivy: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

F: (80:57) Anyone have thoughts about--

Ava: Though, again, with the menstrual thing, it's like, what do you define as sex? Are we talking about PIV? What is the purpose of this? Are we talking about the risk of disease transmission? Are we talking about just menstrual… What are you going for here, because there are so many shades of possibilities.

F: Yeah. Thanks, Ava. Chris, what are you thinking?

Chris: That was basically it. (Laughter.) Without any specification. I just don't like the term, "Are you sexually active?" What does that mean? Active in what?

Ava: Yes. Exactly, yes.

F: (81:44) Ivy?

Ivy: I think having it general like, “When was the last time you committed a sexual act?” (Laughter.) Sorry, I don’t know how to… “When was the last time you had a sexual act or encounter,” rather than “had sex.”

F: (82:07) Anything else?

Lily: I would feel more comfortable if it was asked on paper than just saying it that way. But I’d answer it either way. It's just less awkward that way.

F: Chris?

Chris: Yes, I agree with. I feel like, too, they also will say---

Ivy: Like you can mark it.

Respondent: Yes, and they say, at least sometimes I’ve seen, “What partners you have,” and then it sometimes will detail, like, “Do you do these things?” You can just X like, “Yes, I’ve done that.”

Ava: Exactly, yes.

F: (82:47) So more specificity and privacy

All: Yeah.

F: (82:53) Healthcare providers or researchers sometimes ask whether or not you use a second method of contraception when you last had sex. I’ll repeat this question, Amelia just joined us. Healthcare providers or researchers sometimes ask whether or not you used a second method of contraception when you last had sex. How do you think it is best to ask that question? Ivy?

Ivy: I don’t know, but I feel like when they’re asking that, they’re specifically asking straight couples, to be honest. Like, “are you protected from having a baby?” Or from getting pregnant or something. I feel it’s very targeted for straight people .

Ava: It’s like being gay is the second form. (laughs)

Ivy Yes, that is a second form.

F: Amelia?

Amelia: I think it's just a common follow up question to that being asked if you’re using a condom or do you mean a dental dam? What types of second contraception is it?

F: Yeah.

Lily: Or even “What forms of protection are you using?” and leave a blank line for someone to fill in.

F: Thanks, Lily.

Chris: I feel like it needs to be two different categories. I feel like it needs to be, what are you doing to prevent pregnancy, if that's what you were trying to do and you’re in a relationship where that's a possibility. And what are you doing to prevent STIs, because those are two very different things, and the things you do for that are very different, or can be very different. They overlap, but there are some you wouldn't do for one and vice versa.

Ava: Yes, that's a good point, too. Yes, because condoms will cover a couple of things, but other things won't. Anyway, yes.

F: (84:57) We're coming to the end of our discussion. Before we end, is there anything else that you think we should know about your experiences with your menstrual cycle while you're taking contraception that we did not talk about today? Thinking about all of this this here (gesturing to the wall), all of the questions. Yes, anything that… Ivy?

Ivy: For "impact on life", I just forgot to mention that—I know you said you do (referring to Chris)—but I don't use cups because I'm scared of dislodging the IUD. (Laughter.) I feel like there's a specific thing in my life I'm doing now.

Chris: I do have that anxiety sometimes.

Ava: I think people should know more about, it is a really good thing to pursue hormonal therapy for terrible periods and stuff, but also, it's not a magic wand, and I think people should be more aware of that, as, "This isn't going to fix everything. It just might make things, kind of, weird, but it's up to you to choose."

F: (86:14) Anything else that you want to add.

Lily: I would add how your mental state feels, your emotions and that. Like your inner being, versus just the outer.

Ava: That's a really good point.

F: (86:35) Amelia?

Amelia: A lot of the time I feel rushed sometimes with the providers. I feel like they should encourage you to seek out and read different forums and experiences and stuff, because they might not have the time or they just give generals, or be optimistic for what you want. Also, another thing that I don't know if providers know or would be responsible to tell you, but access to maybe free or reduced cost… What's it called? Feminine products. (Others agreeing)

Ivy: No period tax! (others agreeing)

F: (87:21) Chris?

Chris: I think it would be really helpful in my dream world, if they sent out maybe a questionnaire. I know they do mental health check-ins. They always have that thing before you go into the doctor. I wish that they had a questionnaire that had, "What was your menstrual cycle like," and details there, because I also feel like you could likely catch diseases ahead of time. You could say, "That's weird that your period has changed so much, so quickly and nothing has happened." I feel like that would be a really easy thing to have flagged in an Epic system or a medical system where it's like, "Interesting, their period was normal, and now it's super heavy," or, "They're having all of these issues. We should investigate that," and it would trigger a doctor to maybe send a MyChart message and say, "We should get you in to just do a Pap smear," or something to make sure you don't have cervical cancer, or whatever. All the various things that aren't caught fast enough.

Ava: That's a great point. Period tracking for more purposes than actually just, "Can you get pregnant," or something.

Chris: Yes, it would just be nice if doctors actually… felt like they were more invested in that, because all women's healthcare is sort of an afterthought. Just like, "Well, you've just got to deal with it. That's what you have. You have a uterus. It sucks." That's how it feels honestly.

Ava: Yes, pretty much, yes. Again, we're going to say a standardization of pain levels, blood loss, et cetera, et cetera. When we're talking about blood loss, I went through many years of losing what I now know is an unreasonable amount of blood. I didn't know that because nobody ever talks about this stuff. Yes, it would be great to have more of this, and also, especially when healthcare providers are offering contraceptive plans, and so on, to be like, "This is how…" At least make educated guesses about how it might affect you or if you can come back and be like, "This may be a little unusual," or something like that.

F: (89:47) Thanks, Ava. Thank you so much for joining the discussion today. I really appreciated all of your thoughts and experiences and your willingness to share with us. Thank you.

Amelia: Thank you. (Others agreeing)

F: (90:01) Of course. I'm going to stop the recording. Today is August 27, 2025. It is 7:22 p.m. and this is Focus Group 30-02.

(End of audio.)