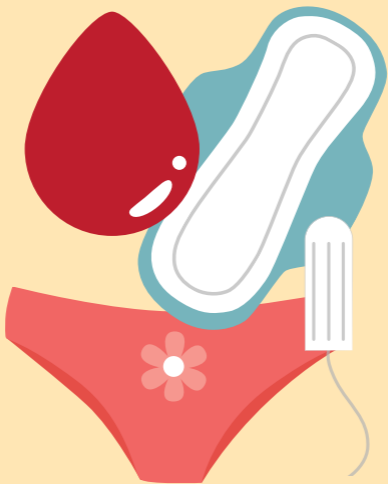


# Let's talk periods



Menstrual health matters

Periods, also called menstruation, are a normal part of a woman's life. Periods are when you bleed from your vagina for a few days each month.

## Why?

Female hormones cause an egg to mature and be released from your ovaries. The lining of your uterus becomes thick with blood and tissue to get ready for a fertilized egg (which can become a baby). If the egg isn't fertilised, this lining isn't needed so it comes away and passes out of the body through your vagina.

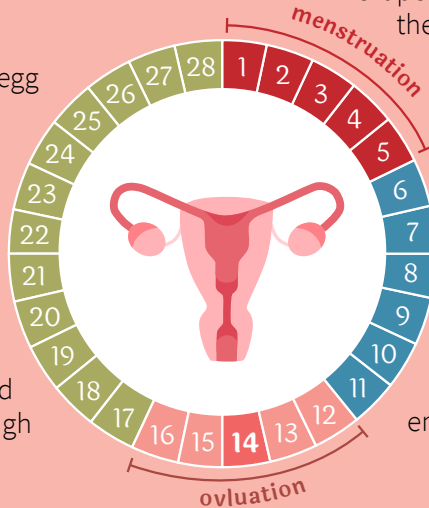
**This is your period.**

## Your cycle

There are about 28 days between the start of your period and the start of your next period – this is called the menstrual cycle. But

everyone is different and normal periods can happen more or often.

The bleeding lasts between 3 and 8 days – usually about 5 days. It is heaviest on the first few days and slows down towards the end of your period.



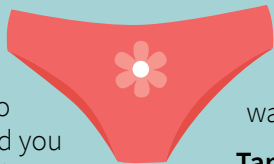
The blood can be bright red and watery, dark red and thick with clots or a brownish colour. This is all totally normal.

Young women usually have their first period between the ages of **9 and 14**. They will probably be irregular at first, but settle into a regular pattern.

## Products

Sanitary products are used to soak up and collect the blood you release during your period. There are lots of different options and sizes to suit how heavy or light your period is and what is easiest for you.

**Sanitary pads** – strips of padding with one side that sticks to your underwear and another



side that soaks up the blood. These pads are disposable (you throw them away after you use them once).

**Reusable pads** – strips of cloth that attach to your underwear that you wash and re-use.

**Period panties** – panties with padding built into them that you wash and re-use.

**Tampons** – small tubes of cotton wool with a string attached that you put into your vagina to soak up the blood and then throw away. Some tampons are put in with a finger and others use an applicator. You pull them out with the string.



**Menstrual cups** – cups made from silicone which you put inside your vagina to collect the blood. These are emptied and washed and can be used again.



## Hygiene tips

Periods are not dirty but, as with all body functions, you need to take care of hygiene. These things will help you stay healthy during your period:

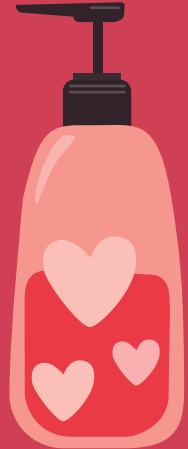
**Change sanitary products often** – every 6-8 hours but at least once a day.

**Throw products away properly** – wrap disposable products in paper or plastic and throw them away in a closed bin. Don't flush sanitary pads down the toilet.

**Wash reusable products** in hot, soapy water and let them dry completely before you use them again.

**Wash your hands** with soap and water every time you have change sanitary products.

**Wash, bath or shower daily** when you have your period but do not use soap or other products inside your vagina as these can irritate the skin.

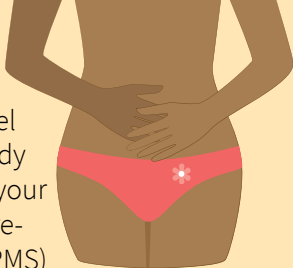


## What is PMS?

Sometimes, you can feel some things in your body just before and during your period. This is called premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and can include:

- Tummy pains or cramps
- Tender breasts
- Bloating
- Mood swings or feeling irritable
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Low back pain

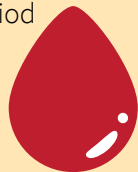
These are all normal. Take pain medicine or use a hot water bottle. Exercise can also help with cramps and mood.



## When to get help

Most young women will have periods regularly without problems. But you should visit the clinic or doctor if you have the following:

- Bleeding for more days than usual
- Bleeding very heavily with many clots
- Suddenly feeling sick after using tampons
- Bleeding between periods (more than just a few drops)
- Experiencing very bad mood swings
- Unbearable pain during your period
- You haven't started your period by the age of 16
- Your period has suddenly stopped



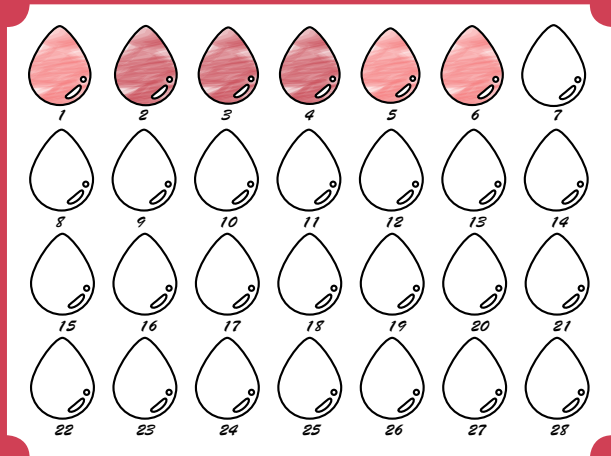
# Keeping track

Keeping track of when you have your period helps to know when your next period is coming. There are apps (Clue, Flo, Eve etc) and free paper period trackers you can use for this.

There are many reasons for not getting your period when you expect to, but if you are having sex, a missed period may mean you are pregnant. So think about a pregnancy test if your period is more than a week late.

**Remember, you can still get pregnant if you have sex without protection while you have your period!**

Almost all women have experienced periods – your mother, teachers and friends, nurses, politicians, sportspeople, celebrities. They've all been there and know what it's like.



# my journey

Find out more at

[myjourney.org.za](http://myjourney.org.za)



This information leaflet was created by NACOSA with funding from The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

**NACOSA**

[www.nacosa.org.za](http://www.nacosa.org.za)