



# Periods and the menstrual cycle

## Acknowledgements

Jean Hailes acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continued connection to land, waters and culture. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

This resource has been developed in partnership between Jean Hailes for Women's Health and Alukura Women's Health Service on behalf of Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (Congress), on the land of the Central Arrernte people.

We acknowledge the support and involvement of NT Health – Primary and Public Health, Central Australia.

We would also like to acknowledge the women of Mparntwe (Alice Springs) and surrounding communities who participated in consultations to help shape these resources.

Jean Hailes for Women's Health gratefully acknowledges the support of the Australian Government.



## Feedback

We welcome all feedback and suggestions on how to improve this toolkit.

Send your feedback to [education@jeanhailes.org.au](mailto:education@jeanhailes.org.au)

## About us

### About Jean Hailes

Jean Hailes for Women's Health is a national not-for-profit organisation committed to improving women's health across Australia through every life stage. We use the latest research to develop our website and resources on a range of topics, including polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), periods, sex and sexual health, menopause, endometriosis, and vulva, vagina, ovaries and uterus.

Jean Hailes takes a broad and inclusive approach to the topic of women's health. The terms 'women' and 'girls' are used throughout this resource to refer to all women, girls and gender-diverse people.



### About Alukura

Alukura Women's Health Service is an Aboriginal women-only place in Alice Springs caring for the health of Aboriginal women and infants. The name 'Alukura' is a Central Arrente word meaning women's camp or women's place. The service is provided in a comfortable and culturally safe place for clients.

Alukura provides specialised women's health and midwifery case-managed maternity care. It is guided by traditional Aboriginal grandmother's law to preserve and recognise Aboriginal women's law, culture and languages, as they relate to pregnancy, childbirth and the care of Aboriginal women and babies. With a multi-disciplinary team approach, Alukura ensures Aboriginal women and babies have access to best practice comprehensive primary health care.

Alukura is part of Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, which is the largest Aboriginal community-controlled health organisation in the Northern Territory.



## How to use this toolkit

This toolkit has been designed to help health professionals and other health workers deliver education about periods and the menstrual cycle and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) to Aboriginal women. It includes two presentations:

- Periods and the menstrual cycle
- Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

These are available as hard-copy flipcharts or can be downloaded electronically from [www.jeanhailes.org.au/resources/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-resources](http://www.jeanhailes.org.au/resources/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-resources)

### Using this toolkit

Before using the presentations, we recommend you read through them in full and ensure you understand them.

The presentations have been developed to use with Aboriginal women and girls in Central Australia and might not be appropriate for use with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in other parts of Australia. We recommend always consulting with knowledgeable people in the local community, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers, Liaison Officers or

Community Engagement Workers, before using this toolkit to ensure it is relevant and culturally appropriate.

Remember that much of the information in the presentations is considered Women's Business and is regarded as sensitive and private to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. It should not be shared with or made available to men.

The presentations can be used in group sessions and one-on-one consultations. You may choose to deliver the full presentation, or just a few slides, depending on the type of session and the needs of the audience. The time required to deliver a presentation depends on the topic and the needs of the audience. Allow around 30 minutes to deliver *Periods and the menstrual cycle* and around 45 minutes to deliver *Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)*. When delivering the presentations in a group setting, a private space should be provided for the participants to attend. If you are using an iPad or tablet to deliver the presentation, we recommend printing the facilitator notes to refer to.

## Further information

You can view and download additional resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls from [www.jeanhailes.org.au/resources/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-resources](http://www.jeanhailes.org.au/resources/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-resources)

For example:

- brochures on periods and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)
- animations on periods, what's PCOS, and how to stay healthy with PCOS.

## Useful websites

Australian Indigenous Health *InfoNet*

[www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au](http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au)

Jean Hailes for Women's Health

[www.jeanhailes.org.au](http://www.jeanhailes.org.au)

Central Australian Aboriginal Congress

[www.caac.org.au](http://www.caac.org.au)

# About the artwork



The cover artwork is **Arntarntarerreme (Looking after each other)** by Amunda Gorey. "This one is women with PCOS finding support in services and other women. The shelters on the sides represent the safety and privacy in these supports."

Amunda Gorey is an Arrernte artist who grew up in the remote community of Santa Teresa, an hour south-east of Alice Springs.



Illustrations by Coolamon Creative.

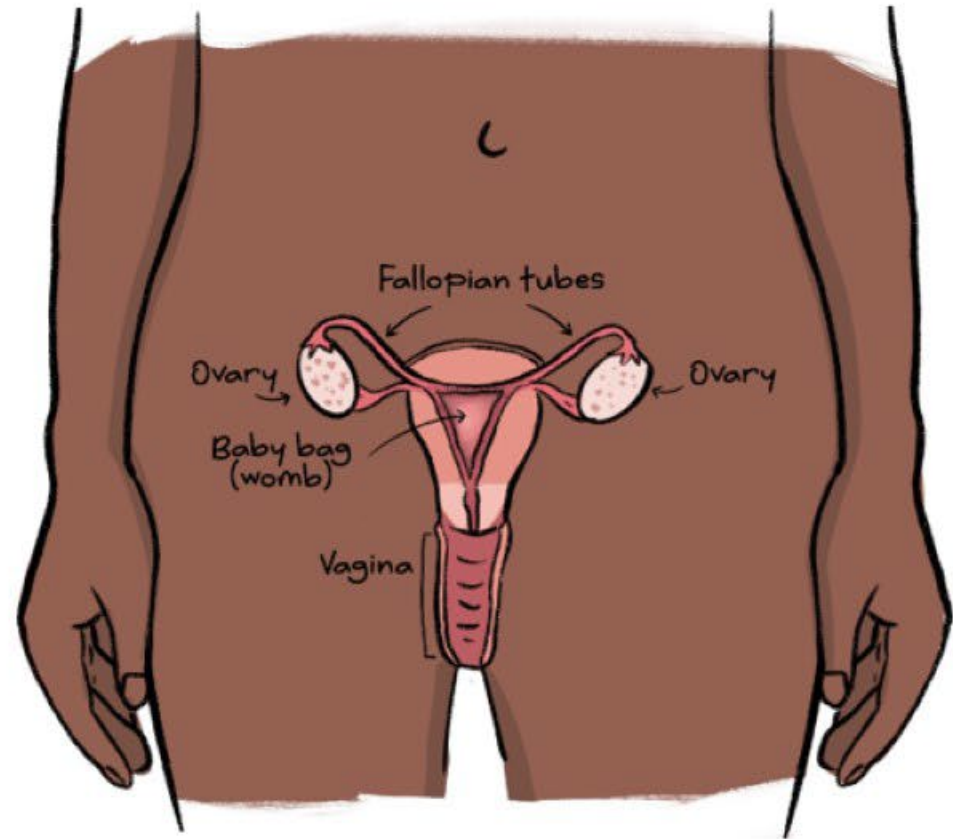
Coolamon Creative is a 100% Aboriginal owned and operated creative services agency operating out of Darwin and Alice Springs.

# What is a menstrual cycle?

Your menstrual cycle means changes in your body to get ready for a pregnancy.

Multiple body parts are involved in the menstrual cycle:

- ovaries
- fallopian tubes
- baby bag (womb or uterus).



# Hormones

The menstrual cycle is controlled by hormones.

Hormones:

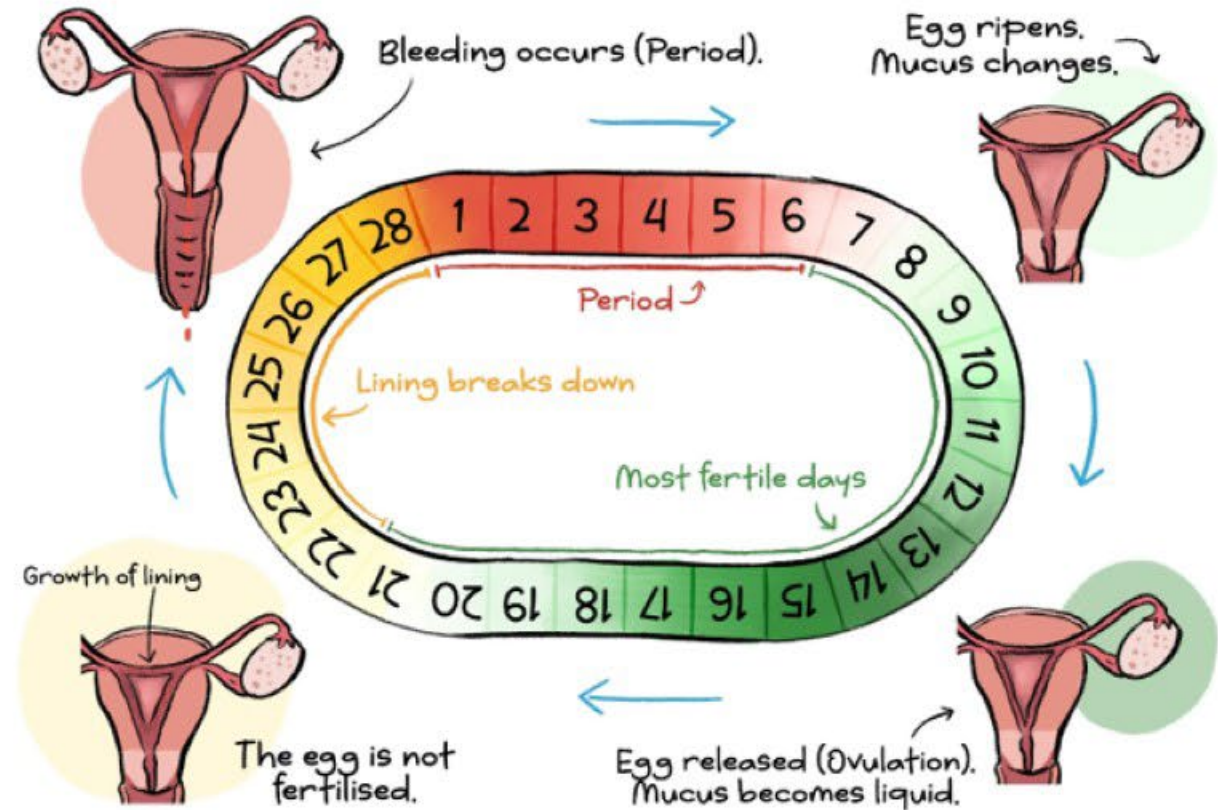
- are chemicals made in different parts of the body
- control many of the body's functions.





# The menstrual cycle

During the menstrual cycle, changes happen in your body to get ready for a pregnancy.

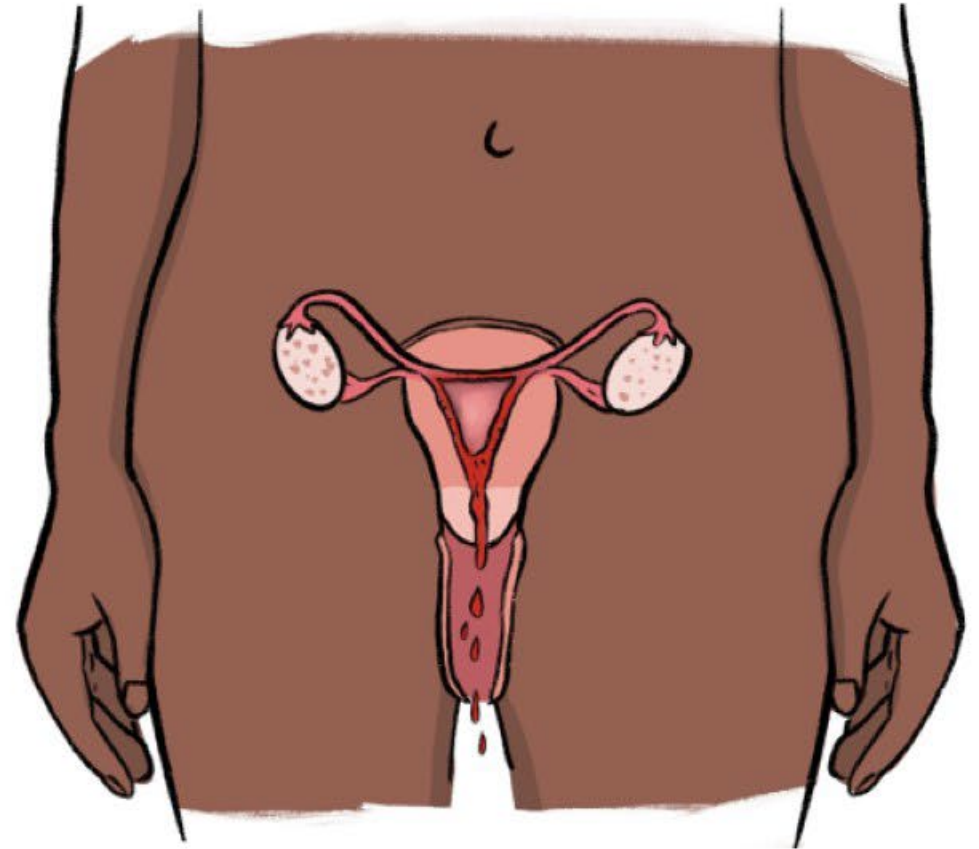


# What is a period?

A period:

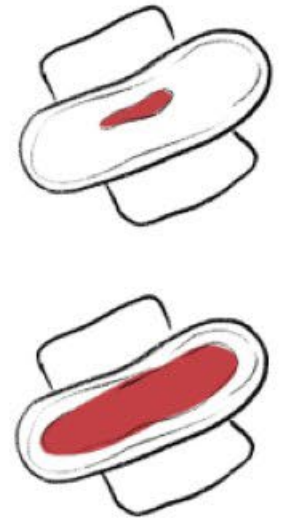
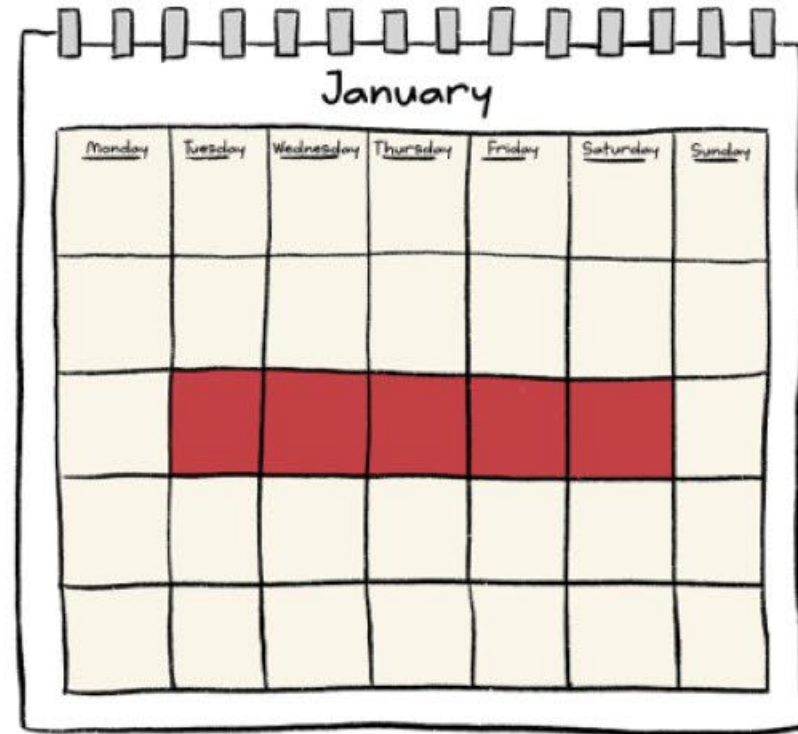
- is when you bleed from your vagina every month
- means you are not pregnant.

Periods are normal, healthy and not something to feel ashamed or embarrassed about.



# What to expect when you have your period

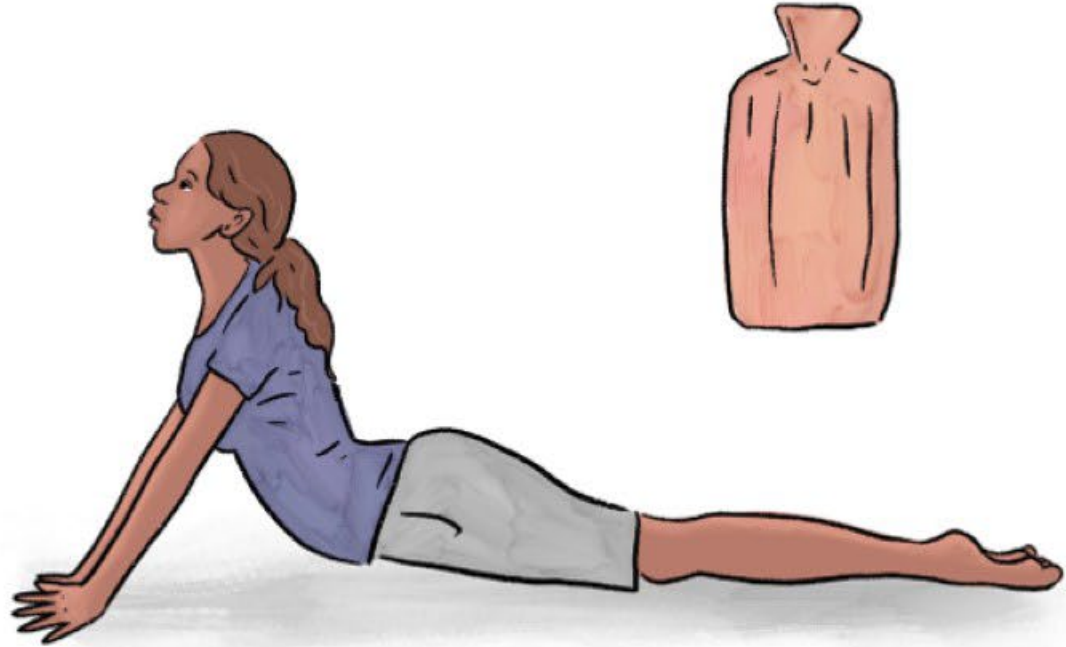
- 3–7 days bleeding about once a month.
- Blood flow can change during your period.
- Blood colour can range from bright red to dark brown.



# Period pain

On the first 1–2 days you might have pain in your tummy or lower back.

The pain should go away with heat packs, medicine like Nurofen™ or gentle exercise.



# Period pain

Talk to your health carer if you have strong pain or the pain doesn't go away.

Your health carer might be a doctor, nurse or health worker.



# Symptoms before your period

In the week before your period you might notice:

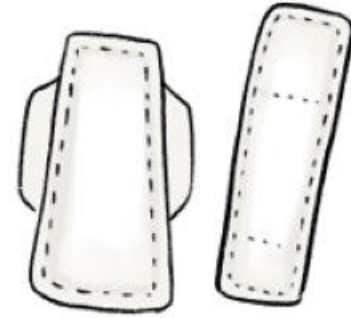
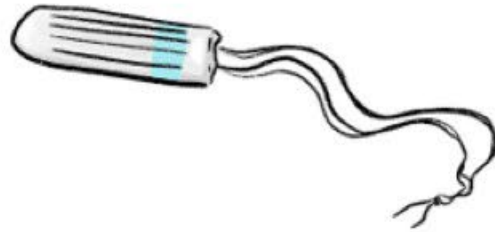
- pimples
- mood changes (feeling sad or angry)
- sore breasts
- trouble going to the toilet (constipation or diarrhoea).



# Managing your period

There are products you can use to manage the blood flow when you have your period. For example:

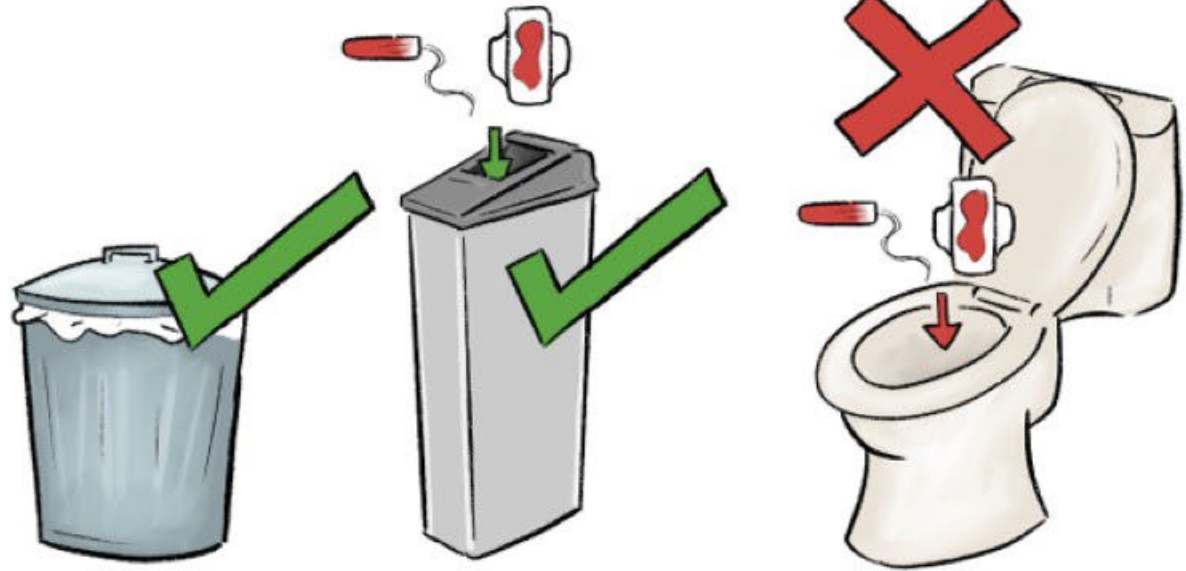
- pads
- tampons
- period underwear
- reusable pads
- menstrual cups.



# Where to put used pads and tampons

Wrap with a small amount of toilet paper and put in a rubbish bin.

Never flush pads and tampons down the toilet!





# When to talk to your health carer

Talk to your health carer if you're worried about your period.

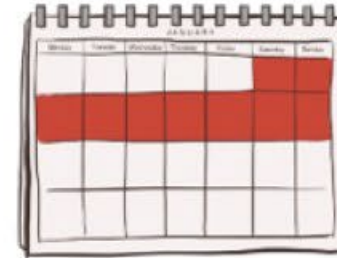
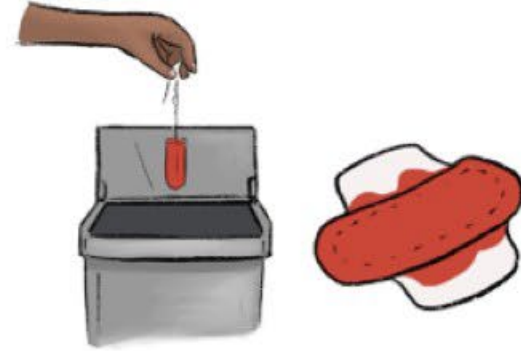
You can talk to your health carer if your period:

- doesn't come every month
- doesn't come at the same time every month,  
or
- doesn't come at all.



# When to talk to your health carer

You can talk to your health carer if you have heavy bleeding.



# When to talk to your health carer

You can talk to your health carer if you have bad period pain that stops you from doing things.

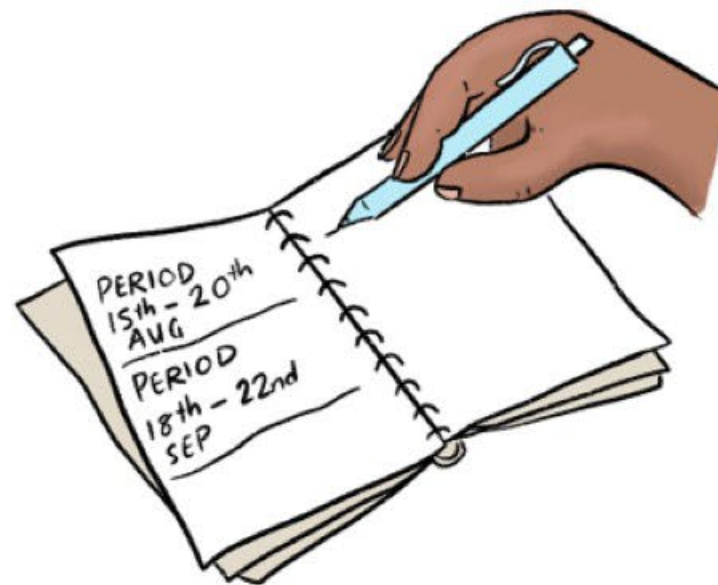


# Keep track of your period

It's good to keep track of your period. You can use:

- a calendar
- a diary
- an app.

This information will help if you need to see a health carer.



# Remember

1. Keep track of your period.
2. Talk to your health carer if you are worried about your period.



# Thank you

Go to [jeanhailes.org.au](https://jeanhailes.org.au) for more resources, videos and articles



**For further information contact**

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**Disclaimer:** This information does not replace medical advice. If a person is worried about their health, they should talk to their doctor or healthcare team.

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