



# Periods

## What is a period?

A period is when you bleed from your vagina every month. Periods are a natural part of your body's menstrual cycle. Your menstrual cycle prepares your body for possible pregnancy. If you are not pregnant, hormones cause your uterus lining to shed and flow out of your vagina. This is the start of your period.

## When do periods start?

In Australia, the average age to have your first period is 12 to 13, but it can start as early as nine and as late as 16. See your doctor if your periods have not started by the age of 16 to 17.

## When do periods finish?

Your final period is called 'menopause'. In Australia, the average age to reach menopause is 51 to 52, but it can happen as late as 60.

## How long is an average menstrual cycle?

Your menstrual cycle is measured from the first day of your period to the day before your next period. Everyone's cycle is different. The average length of a menstrual cycle is 28 days.

## What to expect during your period

Your period might last from three to seven days. Most people lose less than 80 mL of blood in total during their period. Bleeding can vary from a small amount to a heavy loss. Your period flow may be heavier for the first three days and lighter towards the end.

The colour of your period can change from dark brown to bright red.

Some small blood clots are normal, but if you notice clots larger than a 50-cent coin, talk to your doctor.

It's normal for periods to have a distinct smell. If you are worried about the smell, talk to your doctor.

## What can affect your period?

Many factors can affect your period, including medicines, illness, hormones, hormone therapy, stress, exercise, diet and weight.

## What is the best product to use for periods?

There are many types of period products available, including tampons, pads, period underwear, menstrual cups and menstrual discs. You may need to try a few before you find products you like.

## Premenstrual syndrome (PMS)

Many people experience emotional and physical symptoms before they get their period. This is known as 'PMS'. Common symptoms include cramps, irritability, bloating, pimples and tiredness.

Most people have one or two symptoms that can be easily managed. Symptoms usually stop after your period starts.

There are many ways to manage PMS symptoms, including eating healthy food, keeping active, practising relaxation techniques, getting quality sleep and taking medicines recommended by your doctor.

## Period pain

Period pain happens when your uterus muscles tighten (contract). Pain might include cramping and heaviness in the pelvic area, and pain in the lower back, stomach or legs. Period pain is normal if:

- it happens on the first two days of your period
- it goes away when you take pain-relief medicines or use hot or cold packs
- it doesn't impact your daily life.

## How do you know if you have heavy periods?

A heavy period (heavy menstrual bleeding) is when you lose lots of blood each period. You may have heavy periods if you need to change your period product every two hours or less, you notice blood clots that are bigger than a 50-cent coin or your period lasts more than eight days.

It's important to see your doctor if you have heavy periods and symptoms such as cramps and fatigue affect your daily life.

## When to see your doctor

See your doctor if you are worried about your period. For example, if:

- your periods don't follow a pattern (i.e. they come later or earlier, or are shorter or longer than usual)
- you don't get your period at all
- you experience severe emotional or psychological distress in the lead-up to your period
- symptoms affect your quality of life.

For more information, resources and references, visit [jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/periods](https://jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/periods)



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Disclaimer: This information does not replace medical advice. If you are worried about your health, talk to your doctor or healthcare team.

We write health information for people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and identities. We use the term 'women', but we acknowledge that this term is not inclusive of all people who may use our content.

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