Resource & Activities Guide for Healthcare Workers

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Melbourne Sexual Health Centre
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This workbook has been designed to serve as a guide and resource for healthcare workers to deliver The Sacred Sistas Project within their communities. It is assumed those using this guide have participated in a Sacred Sistas session, delivered by the Wulimperi Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sexual Health Unit, from Melbourne Sexual Health Centre (MSHC).

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INTRODUCTION

The Sacred Sistas Project began in 2012. Arimaya Yates, a dedicated Koorie midwife, committed to improve the sexual and reproductive health and knowledge of young Aboriginal women developed the Sacred Sistas workshop. The unique aspect of the Sacred Sistas workshop combined together art-based activities and sexual health promotion and information. Sacred Sistas workshops aimed to ensure a safe space for Aboriginal women to learn, yarn, share and build rapport with women attending the workshop, Aboriginal healthcare workers and service providers.

Over the years I worked with many women and girls.

After spending time working in an Aboriginal community-owned and run birth centre. I realised that many young women may have limited awareness of their body, cycles, and fertility. It is important to teach young girls the importance of respectful relationships.

My view to Aboriginal culture teaches through oral and visual ways. My aim is to bridge the arts and storytelling with concepts of health promotion of women’s sexual and reproductive health.

Sacred Sistas Workshop provides for young women and Aboriginal women to share stories and learn about women’s business in a safe and creative environment. Sacred Sistas Workshops aims to increase knowledge and understanding as women and for women. Workshops bring women together to encourage the Importance of healthy, safe relationships, health promotion and positive strategies.

I hope the Sacred Sistas workshops will bring both you and your community positive outcomes and fun while doing it!

Arimaya Yates
Koorie Midwife
Created - Sacred Sistas Workshops.
PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Sacred Sistas Workshops is an arts-based sexual and reproductive health promotion program for young Aboriginal women and girls aged 12-30 years. These workshops were facilitated in Victoria, Australia from 2010. Sacred Sistas workshops are designed to support Aboriginal health workers and health professionals, to promote women’s health and to increase their knowledge of sexual and reproductive health education. This workbook is developed to profile the capacity for ongoing sexual and reproductive health education within their communities.

Aims

Sacred Sistas Workshop aims to raise awareness to reproductive and sexual health. The workshops are designed to provide a safe space for women learn about topics of sexual and reproductive health. More specifically, the project aims to:

- Increase women’s awareness of their bodies, sexuality, sexual and reproductive health promotion.
- Promote contraceptive options and knowledge of fertility.
- Encourage the importance for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) screening.
- Aims to increase STI screening rates within the community.
- Work with, and train health care workers to facilitate the delivery of an arts-based health promotion ‘Sacred Sistas workshop, aimed to local projects with a community driven focus, for long term sustainability.

Creating while learning

While participants create arts activities, discussion is for sexual and reproductive health promotion. Women are invited to participate in a safe space that allows expression, information-sharing and the ability to seek professional advice and support.

Topics are presented with an age-appropriate focus. Each workshop can be tailored for specific needs. All participating women are educated on these topics and how to use the creative arts for expressing aspects of women’s health and wellbeing during a Sacred Sistas workshop.

Topics can include:
- Puberty and menarche
- Menstrual cycle
- Ovulation and fertility
- Pregnancy and conception
- Safe sex
- Contraception
- Body awareness
- STIs & BBVs
- STI & BBV screening
- Pap testing
- HPV vaccination
A workbook to facilitate a Sacred Sistas Workshop
1. PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The Sacred Sistas Project can be structured in a number of different ways to suit your specific group of girls and/or healthcare workers. When working out the best option for your community, focus on availability of the young girls you wish to target, as well as any relevant healthcare workers and service providers you would also like to attend.

*women’s wellbeing activities / event.

It is recommended a 30minute lunch break and morning/afternoon tea breaks. Sacred Sistas workshop can be incorporated within an existing program, or a planned women’s day event. The creative clay art activity (see page 10), will require time to sculpture the clay and paint. A preference may be to create the clay sculpture before lunch and continue to paint the clay following your designated lunch break.

Ultimately it is up to you how you fit in the program and adapt it to the needs of your community.

2. CONFIDENTIALITY

The Sacred Sistas project aims to create an environment for women to build rapport with healthcare professionals’. As sexual health promotion topics are discussed during the creative arts activities; women may feel comfortable to share, participate in discussion and ask many questions during the Sacred Sistas workshop.

Healthcare workers have obligations with regard to confidentiality. Each health service will have a confidentiality agreement that all staff sign upon employment. It is vital to ensure the terms of confidentiality agreement apply when running a Sacred Sistas workshop.

Refer to contacts and resources section, pages 21-24. Information on privacy and confidentiality.
There are two arts activities that form the basis of the Sacred Sistas Workshop:

1. Beaded cycle bracelet
2. Creative clay activity.

Detailed information on how to run these activities is provided below. You may also like to develop your own creative projects. A number of other arts-based activity suggestions are also provided to help guide and inspire you. Please see the ‘contacts and resource list’ on page 20 for a list of arts suppliers where you can purchase beads and clay.

The Sacred Sistas workshop is in principle, special women’s business and facilitators are required to ensure sensitivity and privacy is maintained. A policy of “what enters this space does not leave this space” will be followed, and confidentiality assured.

3.1 CYCLE BRACELETS

Beaded cycle bracelets are an innovative arts activity of Sacred Sistas workshops to explain different phases of a woman’s cycle: menstruation, fertility, ovulation and non-fertile days. The number of beads of the bracelet is based on a 28 day cycle. However, it is very important to explain the many normal variations of each woman’s cycle when explaining the different phases. For further information, Menstrual Cycle Reference Guide in the Appendix, pages 27-31.

When beading, we can yarn about puberty, menarche, menstruation, fertility, and contraception, empowerment of women’s bodies, hormones and feelings. Facilitating discussion so young women feel comfortable being part of the learning space is important as it will allow them to open up and be included in the information sharing.
Materials required (per person):
5 red beads
18 black beads
4 yellow beads
1 orange bead
1 piece of stretchy thread, approximately 20cm in length
Scissors to share among group
Threading needles (optional)

Cycle Bracelets:
During the beaded cycle bracelet activity, women may yarn about different topics i.e. relate to their bodies, cycles, fertility, pregnancy and so on.

Under each step are suggestions for discussion merely as prompts for you, if required. This workbook has space to record your own questions or information. Delivery of the Sacred Sistas workshop encourages your own innovative style in facilitating this program.

It is very important to discuss safe sex, explain STIs, explain BBVs and encourage discussion of respectful relationships. You should be guided by the women in your group and focus on age-appropriate topics and discussion.

This workbook will assist to suggest a range of discussions during a Sacred Sistas workshop.

1. Begin by tying a knot at the end of the thread

Open up discussion around cycles:
• What do we know about them?
• Are they just periods or is there more?
Allow girls to talk about what they think and know on the topic.
2. Thread 5 red beads onto the string, symbolising the beginning of a woman’s cycle: the menstruation or ‘period days’.

While beading, we can yarn about periods:
- How do we feel when we get our periods?
- What do they mean to us?
- What we do during this time?
- Have periods changed during your life? (e.g. Pre/post children, menopause).

It is important to explain the normal variations: menstrual phase length, and how heavy/light periods are.

3. Add 5 black beads to the thread. These represent the Follicular phase, where the follicles in the ovary become active.

It can be helpful to use visual resources to show how the uterine wall is now rebuilding after the shedding during menstruation. Process of renewal occurring within our wombs, this is a special time as it is preparing our bodies for the possibility of creating a baby.

4. The fertile stage is represented by the yellow beads. Place 3 of the 4 yellow beads onto the thread, symbolising fertile days and the build up to ovulation.

- What kinds of feelings do we develop during this time?
- Do we notice any changes in our bodies? In our moods?
- Some women engage in more sexual activity at this time due to the hormonal changes –good opportunity to discuss STIs, safe sex and respectful relationships.
- What is this increased fertility leading up to? Sperm can last very happily in this environment, waiting for the egg.

While this is all happening, the uterine wall is still building up (ready for implantation of a fertilised egg).
5. The ovulation or ‘egg’. Represented by the orange bead is then placed following the previous 3 fertile days, marking the middle of a woman’s cycle.

This is the mid-point of our cycles. From here, our uterine wall will continue to build for a further 14 days until ready to be shed again. It is also a special day as it is the whole purpose of our cycle – to release an egg waiting to be fertilised by a sperm. Discuss path of the egg and the consequences if it meets a sperm, how long it can last inside the womb, what happens if fertilised (e.g. Conception, implantation, and pregnancy).

6. Place the remaining single yellow bead to follow ovulation, indicating the continuation of fertility beyond the egg’s release.

Important to highlight that sperm can still move very quickly up to an egg the day after it is released.

7. The remaining 13 black beads complete the bracelet representing the luteal phase.

The hormone progesterone is produced, thickening the lining of the uterus in preparation for implantation of a fertilised egg. Where pregnancy does not occur, the progesterone levels begin to fall and the uterine lining sheds, resulting in a period.

8. Tie up the thread and the bracelet is complete!
Sacred Sistas Cycle bracelets

Black beads 16-28 = luteal phase

This time signifies the continual building of the uterine wall, which would allow a fertilised egg to implant and grow (pregnancy).

If the egg is not fertilised after ovulation, the uterine wall will start to come away after day 28, and a new period and cycle will begin.

Orange bead = ovulation day / egg bead

Ovulation occurs roughly two weeks before you get your next period.

Yellow beads = fertile days

Using condoms every time you have sex will prevent pregnancy and sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

The fertile stage of our cycle begins about 3 days before an egg is released from one of our ovaries (ovulation), and continues for a day or so after this. Ovulation and the fertile stage generally occur halfway between periods, however like periods, they are not always regular and we therefore cannot necessarily predict our fertile stage each month, and know when we may fall pregnant.

Red beads = period days / menstruation

Periods can last for 3-8 days and don't always come at the same time each month.

Black beads 6-10 = follicular phase.

After menstruation, when the follicles in the ovaries are becoming active and getting ready for the fertile stage.
3.2 CREATIVE CLAY ART

The clay activity allows women to focus on this personal activity with freedom to express themselves creatively in both the sculpting of the clay and its decoration.

Materials required

- Clay, approx. 10-15cm cubed blob per participant (preferably non-firing clay)
- Paint * acrylic paints: black, white, yellow, red and blue
- Paint brushes (1 per participant)
- Plastic table cloth cover
- Disposable cups (1 per participant)
- Disposable plates (2-3 participants per plate)
- Coloured satin cloth, cut into squares of roughly 25cm x 25cm per participant

Instructions:

1. Set the plastic table cloth cover over the workspace table.
2. Cut the clay so each participant has roughly 10-15cm cubed.
3. Let participants design their own “creative clay” in whatever shape.
4. When clay sculptures are finished, allow participants to wash their hands so they can decorate their bowls with paint.
5. Set up the plates of paint from each colour.
6. Provide cups with water for paint brushes to be washed.
7. It is important to allow enough time for this activity.
While creating and painting the creative clay art, you can yarn about the unique structure of a women’s body, fertility, contraception, sexuality, etc. During this activity the topics are more fluid and you will find many questions are asked, and discussion will flow from their interests.

4. INFORMATION PACKS

Gift packs of information will be given to women at the completion of the Sacred Sistas workshop. You can include any current sexual and reproductive health promotion resources, promotional health material or supplies. You may provide age-specific gift packs of information depending on the age range of women and girls in your group. The following list serves as a guide. There are a number of resources in the Appendices which you could also include.

- Sexually Transmissible Infections booklet (VACCHO)
- Quick Guide to Contraception (VACCHO & FPV)
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations brochures.
- Condoms (preferably SNAKE) and lubricant
- Melbourne Sexual Health Centre wallet resource cards & TestMe promotion cards.
- Victoria Cancer Council brochures on HPV vaccination, pap screening, cervical cancer and breast awareness
- Victorian Government Department of Health information on HPV vaccination
- Contraception options brochure (Marie Stopes International)
- Brochures for local health services, counsellors, housing support etc.
- Further resources relevant to your local community.

NOTES

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Sacred Sistas Workshop June 2015

5. Evaluation for participants

The information you provide is kept confidential and used solely for the purpose of improving the Sacred Sistas Workshops. Thank you.

Host:

Date   □ Example Thursday 4 June 2015 Sacred Sistas workshop   10.30am-1.30pm.

Do you identify as Aboriginal? □ Yes □ No

Do you identify as Torres Strait Islander? □ Yes □ No

Your age (Tick box) □ 12-16 yrs   □ 17-21 yrs   □ 22-26 yrs   □ 27-31 yrs
               □ 32-36 yrs   □ 37 yrs +   □ Elder

1. Who can you go to for advice about sexual and reproductive health?

□ Aboriginal Health Service   □ Family member   □ Elder

□ School Nurse   □ Community Service   □ Friends

□ Other, please specify: _________________________

2. Did you enjoy the Sacred Sistas workshop? □ Yes □ In some ways □ No

3. What did you like best?

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

4. What did you like least?

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

→ Please turn the page → → →
6. How would you rate the presenter of Sacred Sistas workshop?

☐ Poor    ☐ Average    ☐ Good    ☐ Very good    ☐ Excellent

7. From the list: What interested you the most in learning from today? (Tick 1 or more boxes)

☐ Safe Sex    ☐ Contraception    ☐ Menstrual cycle ‘period’    ☐ Body Awareness

☐ Blood Borne Viruses (BBV)    ☐ Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) e.g. Chlamydia

☐ HPV vaccination    ☐ Pregnancy    ☐ TEST ME packs

☐ Sexual Health Checks    ☐ Pap Testing

8. Is there anything you wanted to learn more about, that was not covered today?
Please specify.

_________________________________________________________________________________________

9. Any other comments / feedback?

_________________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________________

Thank you very much. Please return the survey before you leave today.
7. PROGRAM DELIVERY CHECKLIST

Being prepared and organised for a session is important, and the following checklist has been provided to assist you in planning your own Sacred Sistas Workshop. Please add your own suggestions to make the list reflect the Sacred Sistas Workshop and women’s health program.

- This workbook
- Information packs for women
- Beads, string, threading needles (see 3.1 on page 5 for list of quantities required)
- Clay, paint brushes and paints.
- Catering, if desired
- (If available) Female anatomy charts, reproductive cycle etc.
- Printed evaluation surveys (see Appendix for sample to photocopy/edit)
- Camera
- Photographic consent forms (if taking photos)
- Current and relevant health promotional material available
- Sacred Sistas Workshop Certificate- Design your own certificate.
- Educational Sample of a TestMe pack. Contact Melbourne Sexual Health Centre.
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8. CONTACTS AND RESOURCE LIST

ARTS SUPPLIES

Beads
We use 6mm beads in red, black, yellow and orange.
We recommend Wholesale Beads (formally known as Beads and Buttons Galore), who deliver across Victoria. Their retail shops are located in Moorabbin and Prahran, Melbourne.

  Wholesale Beads
  www.wholesalebeads.com.au
  Ph.: 03 9599 9000 (Moorabbin) or 9510 5477 (Prahran)
  Email: mail@wholesalebeads.com.au

Beads are easy to come by at a number of art shops across the state, so if you prefer you can choose your own beads elsewhere in the four specified colours.

Clay
We recommend Sun Clay as it does not need firing. Within Victoria, an online supplier called Art Materials Pty Ltd can be used, and will deliver state-wide.
Otherwise you can contact your local arts shop and ask for Sun Clay.

  Arts Materials Pty Ltd
  www.artmaterials.com.au
  Ph.: 1300 552 390
  Email: enquiries@artmaterials.com.au

For in-shop service in Metropolitan Melbourne, Sun Clay is available at:

  Walker Ceramics
  2/21 Research Drive, Croydon.
  Ph.: 03 8761 6322
  Email: sales@walkerceramics.com.au

CONTRACEPTION, MENSTRUAL CYCLE & FAMILY PLANNING

Indigenous Women’s Health Portal for health workers

Family Planning Victoria
  www.fpv.org.au/contraception

Online condom store (stock female condoms, non-latex condoms, normal condoms)
  www.condomsaustralia.com.au
Natural Fertility Awareness: Taking Charge of Your Fertility
www.tcoyf.com

Dr Marie Contraception Chart

**WOMEN’S HEALTH**

Jean Hailes Indigenous Womens’ Health Information Portal

Indigenous Women’s Health Portal for health workers

Pap Screen Victoria
www.papscreen.org.au

BreastScreen Victoria
www.breastscreen.org.au

Health for Women
www.healthforwomen.org.au

Yarning about PCOS: Guide to Poly Cystic Ovarian Syndrome

**SEXUALLY TRANSMISSIBLE INFECTIONS (STIs)**

Melbourne Sexual Health Centre STI information (fact sheets)

Australian Government, Young People and STIs campaign

**VIDEO LINKS**

Smart and Deadly Koorie Video clips
www.youtube.com/user/SmartandDeadlyKoorie
**PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

Victorian Government privacy information  

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**OTHER USEFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES**

Melbourne Sexual Health Centre  
[www.mshc.org.au](http://www.mshc.org.au)

Check your Risk – free, quick and confidential test to check your risk of STIs  
[www.checkyourrisk.org.au](http://www.checkyourrisk.org.au)

Test Me – free STI testing service for Aboriginal and rural Victorians.  
[www.testme.org.au](http://www.testme.org.au)

VACCHO  
Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation  

Sexual Health Resource Guide book for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers  

Better to Know – online information for young Indigenous men and women  
[www.bettertoknow.org.au](http://www.bettertoknow.org.au)

Shine South Australia – online sexual health resources  
[www.shinesa.org.au](http://www.shinesa.org.au)

Marie Stopes International resources (contraception, STIs, ‘sexplanations’, abortion)  

Better Health Channel – fact sheets  

Health in Site – general health information  
Sites designed specifically for young people

Somazone – health information on sex, drugs, body image and relationships
www.somazone.com.au

Your Sex Health
www.yoursexhealth.org

Like It Is
www.likeitis.org.au

Reach Out – includes tips for coping with life and info on topics such as safer sex, STIs, contraception and having sex for the first time.
au.reachout.com

Love: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly – dating, sex and abuse in relationships, open and honest answers to questions about sex.
www.lovegoodbadugly.com
### Appendix

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Sacred Sistas Project Evaluation

Thank you for participating in the Sacred Sistas Project. Please answer the questions below and return them to us before you leave today. Your responses to the questions help us make future sessions as useful as possible.

The information you provide is kept confidential and used solely for the purpose of improving the project. Please feel free to discuss with us any concerns you have regarding confidentiality and/or any aspect of the survey. Thank you.

Today’s date:______________________  Your age:______________________

1. Did you enjoy the Sacred Sistas session?
   - No, not at all
   - In some ways
   - Yes, most of it
   - Yes, all of it

2. What did you like best about it?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

3. What did you like least?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

4. How would you rate the facilitator/presenter of the session?
   - Poor
   - Average
   - Good
   - Very good
   - Excellent

5. Was there anything else you wanted to learn more about that was not discussed today?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

6. Any other comments / feedback?
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
MENSTRUAL CYCLE REFERENCE GUIDE

The information in this section is designed to be used as a reference guide when discussing the menstrual cycle during the Sacred Sistas activities. In particular, this information will be very useful when running the cycle bracelet activity.

Menstrual cycle
The menstrual cycle is a series of female body changes controlled by hormones that cause a regular bleed. This bleed, which usually occurs monthly, comes from the uterus (womb) and flows out the vagina. Period, menstruation or menses are all words used to describe the blood loss women experience at this time.

The menstrual cycle begins at menarche (the first period), and ends with menopause (the final period). The average age of menarche in Australia is 11-13 years, but can start as early as 8 and as late as 16. The average age of menopause is 51 with a range from 45-55 years.

Note: Every woman’s cycle is unique and individual in its experience.

Purpose of the menstrual cycle
The role of the menstrual cycle is to prepare the body for pregnancy. When a pregnancy does not occur, a woman will have her period, and the cycle will start over again.

Process within the body
The menstrual cycle occurs due to a complex relationship between hormones from the brain and the ovaries, which leads to the development and release of an egg from the ovary (ovulation) and growth of the internal lining (endometrium) of the uterus, to prepare it for pregnancy. When the hormones signal to the uterus that there is no pregnancy, the lining starts to break down and separate from the wall of the uterus, and the period begins. Once this occurs, the cycle starts again.

During the first two or three years after a girl begins getting her periods, the cycles can be irregular as ovulation does not always occur each cycle. Over the first few years, the body develops a routine of releasing an egg and shedding the lining of the uterus.

Cycle length and the 28 day cycle
Every woman’s body and cycle is different and the length of cycles can range drastically from 21 to 45 days, however most often when a woman reaches her 20-30s the cycle will usually be between 21 and 38 days.

The ‘text book’ cycle is 28 days, used as an average and convenient marker of the phases. The Sacred Sistas cycle bracelet activity uses the 28 day cycle, however individual girls who
know their cycles may wish to add more days to reflect their own bodies. This will increase beads before ovulation, not after. A new cycle will always begin 2 weeks following ovulation (the release of an egg).

**Phases of the menstrual cycle** (using 28 day example)
The following image is a pictorial representation of the phases in the menstrual cycle where the ovarian and uterine cycles can be seen with regard to hormonal changes and time.
1. Menstruation (days 1-5)
The cycle begins with the first day of menstruation. Every woman experiences her periods differently. They can vary in quality and quantity, from a small amount to a heavy loss, and can vary in colour from black/brown to bright red. The period may last from 3-8 days, and most women lose less than 80ml of blood (about 4 tablespoons in total).

The flow changes throughout the period and can be heavier at the beginning, and lighter toward the end. The period contains blood, mucous and some endometrial lining cells. Some small clots may be normal, but if the clots become frequent or larger, consultation with a GP is recommended.

2. Non-fertile days (days 6-10)
The period has usually finished, and the follicular phase continues.

3. Fertile period (days 11-15) & ovulation (day 14)
As the ovaries develop the egg and prepare it to be released, the fertile period begins. Ovulation marks the midway point in the cycle, and for a 28 day cycle will occur on day 14. Where a woman has longer cycles, ovulation will occur later, however the next cycle will always begin 14 days after ovulation, regardless of the length of the first stage.

Some women experience some slight spotting (a tiny amount of blood loss) and/or slight pain at the time of ovulation. This is due to a normal change in some of the hormones following ovulation. If pain or bleeding consistently lasts longer than three days, seeking medical advice is recommend.

4. Luteal phase (days 15-22)
After the egg is released, the hormone progesterone is increased, thickening the lining of the uterus, preparing it for pregnancy.

5. Possible implantation (days 23-24)
Around days 23-24, implantation of a fertilised egg can take place, and if there is no fertilised egg to be implanted, the uterine wall will continue to thicken.

6. Hormonal changes to allow for new cycle to begin (days 25-28)
If pregnancy does not occur, progesterone decreases, and the uterine wall is shed, resulting in a period. At this point the cycle begins again.
Premenstrual Symptoms
Premenstrual symptoms may occur in the one to two weeks before a period. Symptoms may include irritability, bloating, sore breasts, pimples and tiredness. Normally these symptoms can be irritating but would not interfere with day-to-day activities. They usually settle when the period starts or in the first two to three days of the period. In 15-20% of women, symptoms can be so severe that their lifestyle is impaired and they cannot function properly. It is recommended women who struggle with premenstrual symptoms consult a GP.

Sex during menstruation
There is no medical reason why women can’t have sex during their period. Some women prefer not to because of personal, cultural or religious preferences. Pregnancy can still occur at this time and so making sure contraception is used is required to prevent pregnancy. Practicing safe sex is important at any time to prevent contracting STIs.

Sanitary products
Sanitary products are designed to help women and girls participate in normal life while they have their periods. There are a number of options available and every woman will have her own preferences to specific products. Most often women will use a combination of products depending on time of day, heaviness of the period, and what they are doing.

Pads: Also known as sanitary pads, or napkins. Commercially sold in supermarkets, chemists and convenience stores, disposable pads are a product made from absorbent materials. They come in a range of thicknesses and shapes. Pads usually need to be changed 3-4 hourly, and must be disposed of in a rubbish bin (not toilet).

Reusable pads: Reusable, environmentally friendly pads are now becoming more popular and are widely available online. They generally cost a bit more per pad, however can last for up to 5 years and so save women a significant amount of money. They are also more suitable for women who experience irritation to the synthetically based disposable products. Reusable pads come in a variety of shapes and colours.

Tampons: Absorbent ‘plug’ made of cotton, or a combination of cotton and synthetic materials. Tampons are inserted into the vagina and are available in various sizes. They can be used by all

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ages and should be changed every 3-4 hours. Very rarely, Toxic Shock Syndrome can occur when using tampons. This is due to a rapid growth of normal bacteria releasing a toxin which leads to symptoms of ‘shock’, such as feeling unwell, fever, rash, diarrhoea and headache. Tampons should never be kept inside the vagina for more than 8 hours, and women should make sure she always washes her hands before insertion.

Menstrual cups: Very few women use menstrual cups, however, like reusable pads, are becoming more common as people become more concerned with the cost of disposable products to the environment. Menstrual cups have been available for many years and an individual cup can last up to 5-10 years. The cup is made from either rubber (latex), silicone, or thermoplastic rubbers, and sits inside the vagina over the cervix, collecting the menstrual flow. There is no risk of toxic shock syndrome and therefore can be left in overnight. They are emptied into the toilet, rinsed and reinserted into the vagina. It can take a bit of time to get used to using menstrual cups; however there is a wide variety of options to choose from and most women will find one that suits them.

Conclusion
The menstrual cycle is a normal process for a woman’s body. Each woman experiences her cycle differently, most without any difficulties. If a woman is worried about any change in her cycle or aspect of it, she should see a GP.

Glossary of terms
Menstruation (menses, period, bleed): the state of the cycle where
Spotting: tiny amount of bleeding
Ovulation: release of an egg
Uterus (womb): a hollow pear-shaped organ where fertilised eggs can develop
Cervix: Opening to the uterus, at the end of the vagina
Endometrium: lining of the uterus
Menarche: first period
Menopause: last period
Ova: an egg
Ovum: eggs
Ovaries: where eggs develop, and are released from
Fallopian tubes: passages from ovaries to uterus, where eggs and sperm meet
Follicle: developing egg
Corpus Luteum: follicle remains once an egg has been released.
## ONLINE RESOURCES

**Melbourne Sexual Health Centre**
- [www.mshc.org.au](http://www.mshc.org.au)
  - Offers free confidential service at the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre (MSHC)

**Smart and Deadly Koorie video clips**
- [www.youtube.com/user/SmartandDeadlyKoorie](http://www.youtube.com/user/SmartandDeadlyKoorie)
  - Video clips from the Smart and Deadly DVD

**Better to Know**
- [www.bettertoknow.org.au](http://www.bettertoknow.org.au)
  - Online STI information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young men and women.

**Like it is**
- [www.likeitis.org.au](http://www.likeitis.org.au)
  - Everything you want to know about sex and puberty.

**Soma zone**
  - Offers health information on topics such as sex, drugs, body image and relationships

**Check your Risk**
- [www.checkyourrisk.org.au](http://www.checkyourrisk.org.au)
  - Free, quick and confidential test to check your risk of STIs.

**Your Sex Health**
- [www.yoursexhealth.org](http://www.yoursexhealth.org)
  - Sexual health info and real-life video clips of dilemmas young people face.

**Reach Out**
- [au.reachout.com](http://au.reachout.com)
  - Includes tips for coping with life and info on topics such as safer sex, STIs, contraception and having sex for the first time.

**Love: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly**
- [www.lovegoodbadugly.com](http://www.lovegoodbadugly.com)
  - Looks at dating, sex and abuse in relationships and gives open and honest answers to questions about sex.

**Family Planning Victoria**
- [www.fpv.org.au](http://www.fpv.org.au)
  - Includes information on sex and sexuality, relationships, pregnancy, STIs and safer sex.

**Labia Library**
- [www.labialibrary.org.au](http://www.labialibrary.org.au)
  - Information on vulvas, vaginas, what's normal and understanding women’s bodies.
MISSED PILL FACT SHEET

This information relates to the combined pill only, it is not relevant to the mini pill (progesterone only pill). It should be read in conjunction with the instructions in the pill packet. If you are unsure of anything, please consult your doctor.

Are you more than 24hrs late to take the pill?
That is, it has been over 48hrs since you last took a pill.

YES
Take the most recently due on this day straight away. You can throw away any missed pills.
Use condoms for next 7 days.

NO
Take the late pill straight away.
This may mean you end up taking 2 pills in one day, that is ok, the pill will continue to work.

Consider your pill packet and where you were up to when you missed the pill(s).

Less than 7 pills taken since the last placebo break?
(placebo break = larger white sugar pills)
Consider using Emergency Contraception (morning after pill) if unprotected sex occurred within past 5 days.

Less than 7 pills left in the pack before the next placebo break?
(placebo break = larger white sugar pills)
Skip the placebo pills from the remainder of this pack AND your next pack. Continue taking active pills. This may result in you missing your period this month.
Other factors to consider
Abstaining from sex or using an alternative form of contraception (such as condoms) is required to prevent pregnancy in the following situations:

- More than 24 hours late in taking a pill.
- Has been vomiting and/or has diarrhoea.
- Taking a course of antibiotics or some other form of medication or natural therapy, which may alter the pill’s effectiveness (check with doctor).

When to consider emergency contraception (‘the morning after pill’)
To avoid unplanned pregnancy, emergency contraception should be considered:

- If any of the above three points (in ‘other facts to consider’) apply, and unprotected sex has occurred.
- If one or more of the first 7 hormone pills in a packet was missed and unprotected sex occurred during the time of the current packet.

**Emergency Contraception** is available over the counter from pharmacies or from a doctor. If taken within 24 hours of unprotected sex, it is 95% effective in preventing pregnancy. It can be taken up to 120 hours (5 days) after, but its effectiveness is reduced with time.
Sexually transmissible infections (STIs)
Key messages:
- Always use a condom
- STIs can be asymptomatic
- Have an STI check if you ever have unprotected sex.
- You can get an STI from vaginal, oral or anal sex (think VAMP – vagina, anus, mouth, penis)

The more sexual partners you have, the greater your risk. However, you can still get an STI even if you have unprotected sex just once.

Contraception
Key messages:
- Always use contraception correctly every time you have sex.
- Use emergency contraception if you have unprotected sex or you think your contraception may not be reliable.

Important points:
- If you don’t take the pill every day it may not work.
- Use condoms correctly with water-based lubricant.
- Nothing is 100% effective.
- Emergency contraception is not the abortion pill. It is available from chemists and can be used up to five days after sex.

Healthy relationships
Key messages:
- Have sex when you are ready,
- Sexual relationships should be about safety, pleasure and respect.
- Healthy relationships should make you feel good.
- Relationships without sex are fun and fulfilling.
- If you are going to have sex it’s a personal choice and must be consensual.
- Always give and receive clear consent.

Important points:
- Relationships are complex and constantly change. They can create much joy but can also cause a lot of hurt.
- Maintaining health relationships is an ongoing process.
- It is important to stick to your own values.
- It’s ok to enjoy sex / being sexual
- It’s ok to not want to have sex.
- Everyone has varying sex drives (despite society encouraging us to think that everyone is always very sexual).
- Always ask the other person if sexual touch is ok and make sure if you are asked, that you respond clearly.
- It is important to be yourself in a relationship.
- Relationships are very important to your self-esteem and sense of belonging.

Same sex attraction (SSA)
Key messages:
- Diversity is a normal and positive thing.
- SSA young people still need to practice safe sex.
- It is illegal to discriminate based on a person’s sexuality.

Important points:
- 10-15% of the population are SSA.
- Most SSA young people feel comfortable with their sexuality but worry about how others treat them.
- SSA people present in all cultures and religious groups, and have done so throughout history.

Safer sex – physical and social safety
Key messages:
- Always use condoms (& lube).
- Safer sex is about preventing unwanted pregnancy and STIs. It is also about protecting you, your feelings and reputation.
- Think before you upload, test, post or email anything.
- A negative social reputation can last a long time.
Efficacy of contraception methods

Showing typical use for methods available in Australia

**MOST EFFECTIVE**

99%

Less than 1 pregnancy per 100 women in one year

- **Contraceptive implant**
  99.95% effective
  Lasts up to 3 years

- **Hormonal Intrauterine Device (hormonal IUD)**
  99.8% effective, lasts to 5 years

- **Copper intrauterine device (Cu-IUD)**
  99.2% effective
  Lasts to 10 years

- **Sterilisation:**
  - **Male sterilisation (vasectomy)**
    99.85% effective / Permanent
  - **Tubal occlusion by metal microinsert**
    99.8% effective / Permanent
  - **Female tubal ligation**
    99.5% effective / Permanent

91%

6–9 pregnancies per 100 women in one year

- **Contraception injection:**
  Depot medroxyprogesterone acetate (DMPA) 94% effective
  Injection every 12 weeks

- **Contraceptive vaginal ring**
  91% effective
  New ring used every 4 weeks

- **Combined oral contraceptive pill (the COC Pill)**
  91% effective
  Taken daily with 24hr window

- **Progestogen-only contraceptive pill (POP)**
  91% effective
  Taken daily 3hr window

76%

18 + pregnancies per 100 women in one year

- **Diaphragm**
  88% effective

- **Male condom**
  82% effective

- **Female condom**
  79% effective

- **Withdrawal method**
  78% effective

- **Fertility awareness based methods**
  76% effective
  Abstain from intercourse or use another method on fertile days.

*Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (After procedure, little / nothing to do or remember.)

Family Planning Alliance Australia is the nation's peak body in reproductive and sexual health. It promotes advances in public health through policy insight and advocacy and represents leading health and education agencies across Australia.

Reproductive and Sexual Health Policy and Advocacy
www.fpallianceaus.org.au
The copper IUD contains no hormones and lasts for up to 10 years depending on which one you choose.

The hormonal IUD slowly releases very small amounts of hormone into the uterus and lasts for up to 5 years.

The contraceptive implant is a soft, flexible rod that is placed under the skin of the arm. It slowly releases a small amount of hormone. It lasts for up to 3 years.

All three methods can be reversed at any time. Make an appointment to have your contraceptive removed if you wish to become pregnant or change to another method. It will no longer have any effect as soon as it is removed.

All of these methods are much more effective at preventing pregnancy than the pill, injection or condoms.

Please turn over to see the chart.

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