

How to Track Your Cycle and Care for Yourself

Each phase of your menstrual cycle brings subtle shifts in your mood, energy levels, appetite, and even how your skin and digestion behave. Knowing how to track your cycle and understand the changes happening in your body helps you stay connected, aware, and in tune with your body as a woman.

By keeping track of these patterns, you begin to notice what's normal for you and can anticipate what's coming next. You'll know when to expect your period, when you're most fertile, and when your body might need extra rest or care. This awareness can also help you detect early signs of hormonal imbalances, irregularities, or health concerns before they become serious.

App Trackers and other tracking methods

In order to track your period effectively, you first have to understand the basics of the menstrual cycle. Your cycle starts from the first day of your period and ends on the day before your next menstruation. The average length is 28 days. Yours could be anywhere in between 21 to 38 days.

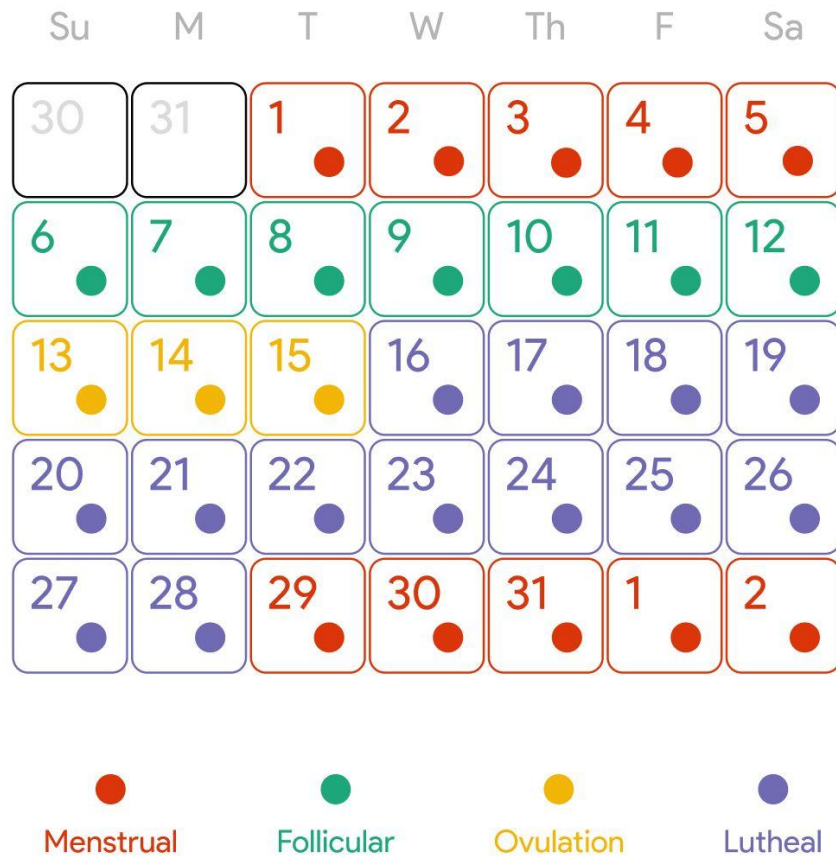
You can track your period manually or with a digital application.

Manual tracking

On a calendar, mark the first day of your period as day 1 and keep marking till the start of a new period in order to establish your cycle length. Before that, note the end of your period and the number of days you bled in order to establish your flow.

With a different colour marker, put a mark between the 11th to the 21st day from the first day of your period. This is a tentative date for your ovulation. Be on the lookout for signs of ovulation and mark the days when you get them. You can also get an ovulation monitor to check. While you may have heard that ovulation occurs on day 14, this is an average and in reality, some women, even those with a 28 day cycle do not ovulate on the 14th day. A [study](#) found that for the 28-day cycles, ovulation occurred most commonly on Day 15 (27%), followed by Day 16 (21%) and Day 14 (20%) and according to a research[4] on 1.5 million women, only about 16% have a 28 day cycle!

JANUARY 2026



App trackers

Digital tracking methods are by far the most convenient way to track periods, especially for newbies or people not very familiar with their cycle yet. While the manual way fosters a deeper and better understanding of our bodies, the digital options are data driven and capable of performing other special functions like analysing basal body temperature in order to predict future ovulation dates, track fluctuations in mood and other [PMS](#) symptoms like fatigue and anxiety. They also record more information like lifestyle patterns in order to have a more holistic view and build a more personalized profile.

For teens or busy adults, it offers convenience and interactive technology, making it possible to visualise their cycle lengths and patterns over months at a time, and observe symptom trends and frequencies.

Consistent tracking helps identify deviations from normal patterns such as missed periods, unusually heavy bleeding, or shortened cycles. For women trying to conceive, app trackers can pinpoint fertile windows with increasing accuracy using data on ovulation predictors.

It's important to note that while period-tracking apps are convenient, they collect a lot of personal data. Many of them share information with third parties. In some areas, especially in states where abortion laws are restrictive, digital records of your cycle could be accessed in legal cases, including those indicative of an abortion. Read privacy policies carefully. Consider apps that prioritize user privacy or keep a manual record to stay safe.

How to know when your period is about to start

If you're able to track your cycle, then you can make a near accurate prediction of your period date with a 2-3 day error margin. However there are other ways to predict your period within a closer time range. The body sometimes gives signs called perimenstrual symptoms. Not everyone gets them but they show up about one to two weeks before your period. They usually go away one to two days after your period starts. These signs include;

Breast tenderness: Tender breasts is a very common sign that your period is about to come. The breasts may feel full and dense and a lot of women have also recorded an increase in breast size just before their period.

Bloating: The changing levels of hormones can cause more salt and water retention leading to uncomfortable feelings of belly tightness. Constipation also directly contributes to this.

Hormonal acne: Changes in hormone levels are linked to skin changes like a change in complexion, oilier skin and acne that clears up after your period.

Dry to no discharge: During ovulation, cervical mucus, a type of vaginal discharge, is copious, slimy, odourless and translucent. This discharge changes in consistency and amount throughout your cycle. Just before menstruation, there is very little to no discharge.

Cramps: Often a day or two before your period. As prostaglandin levels increase before your period, they trigger uterine contractions that cause cramps and pain.

Diarrhea or constipation due to progesterone level increase which has a relaxing effect on the body and can slow down bowel movement. Cramps trigger period poop when the contractions affect your bowels too.

Tiredness: Low energy levels just before your period is very common too. Even when you have a good sleep routine and are well rested, fatigue as a result of hormonal changes, in addition to other perimenstrual symptoms is an indicator of an approaching period.

Food cravings: Hormone fluctuations make us crave different foods during our periods and before it. These fluctuations also affect our appetite differently.

Author

Peace Chukwu is a medical doctor with experience helping young girls and women through puberty and reproductive health. You can learn more about her [here](#).

How to prepare for your next period

1. Office on Women's Health. Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) [Internet]. 2023 [cited 2025 Apr 24]. Available from: <https://womenshealth.gov/menstrual-cycle/premenstrual-syndrome>
2. Mount Sinai. Premenstrual syndrome Available from: <https://www.mountsinai.org/health-library/diseases-conditions/premenstrual-syndrome>
3. Soumpasis I, Grace B, Johnson S. Real-life insights on menstrual cycles and ovulation using big data. Hum Reprod Open. 2020 Apr 16;2020(2):hoaa011. doi: 10.1093/hropen/hoaa011. PMID: 32328534; PMCID: PMC7164578. Available from: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7164578/>
4. Grieger JA, Norman RJ. Menstrual Cycle Length and Patterns in a Global Cohort of Women Using a Mobile Phone App: Retrospective Cohort Study. J Med Internet Res. 2020 Jun 24;22(6):e17109. doi: 10.2196/17109. PMID: 32442161; PMCID: PMC7381001. Available from: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7381001/>