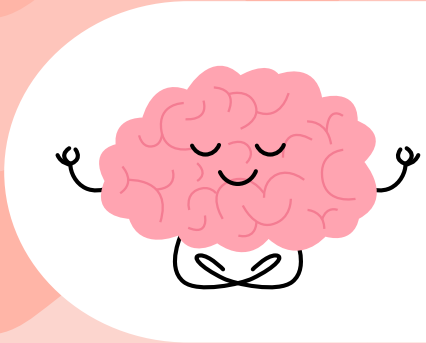
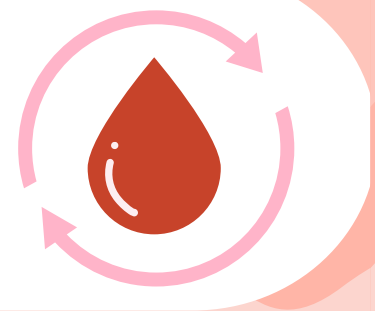




Mental Health and the Menstrual Cycle



What is the Menstrual Cycle?

The menstrual cycle is your body's monthly process to prepare for pregnancy.

If no pregnancy happens, your body sheds the lining of the uterus – this is your period.

When does this begin and how long does this last?

Most will start their menstrual cycle between 8 and 15 years old.

Your menstrual cycle is about 28 days long and has **four** main phases.

What is happening inside?

During each phase, your body's hormone levels – especially estrogen and progesterone rise and fall.

These hormones don't just affect your body – **they also influence your brain and emotions!**

Luteal Phase (Days 15–28)

What's happening?

- The body prepares for a possible pregnancy.
- If an egg isn't fertilised, hormone levels drop.
- This drop can cause PMS (premenstrual syndrome) symptoms like mood swings, anxiety, tiredness and bloating.

Tips:

Reframe negative thoughts: For example if you are feeling overwhelmed and think *"I can't cope"*, reframe this thought as: *"I feel overwhelmed, but I've handled this feeling before and will be ok."*

Self-care practices: Use calming activities like baths, reading, or breathing exercises to support mood regulation.

Talk it out: Share how you're feeling with someone you trust.

Menstrual Phase (Days 1–5)

What's happening?

- This is when your period happens.
- The uterus sheds its lining, which comes out as blood.
- The hormones estrogen and progesterone are at their lowest, you might feel cramps, tiredness, or more be sensitive emotionally.

Tips:

Use heat therapy for cramps and mood relief: Applying a warm water bottle to your abdomen can reduce pain and improve mood by relaxing muscles and lowering cortisol (stress hormone) levels.

Eat iron-rich foods to support energy and mood: Menstrual bleeding lowers iron, which can affect mood and concentration. Iron-rich foods include red meat, spinach and some cereals.

Ovulation Phase (Around Day 14)

What's happening?

- Estrogen peaks and an egg is released – this is the phase you are most likely to get pregnant.
- You may feel confident, social and emotionally upbeat.
- High estrogen levels can enhance mood and reduce anxiety for some, whereas others may feel emotionally heightened.

Tips:

Make social plans: You're likely to feel more outgoing – use it to connect with others.

Get creative: You may feel more creative at this phase in comparison to other phases. Expressive art, such as drawing, music and journaling can help to improve mood and emotional expression in teens.

Follicular Phase (Days 1–13)

What's happening?

- This phase starts at the same time as your period but continues after it ends.
- The hormone estrogen gradually rises and boosts feel-good chemicals (serotonin and dopamine) in the brain.
- You may feel more energetic, focused and emotionally stable – this is often a 'feel-good' phase.

Tips:

Move your body: Physical activity during this phase feels easier and helps to improve mood.

Track your cycle: Use a calendar or tracker app to track your menstrual cycle. This can help you understand your body better and link patterns of changes in your mood or energy to different phases of your cycle.

