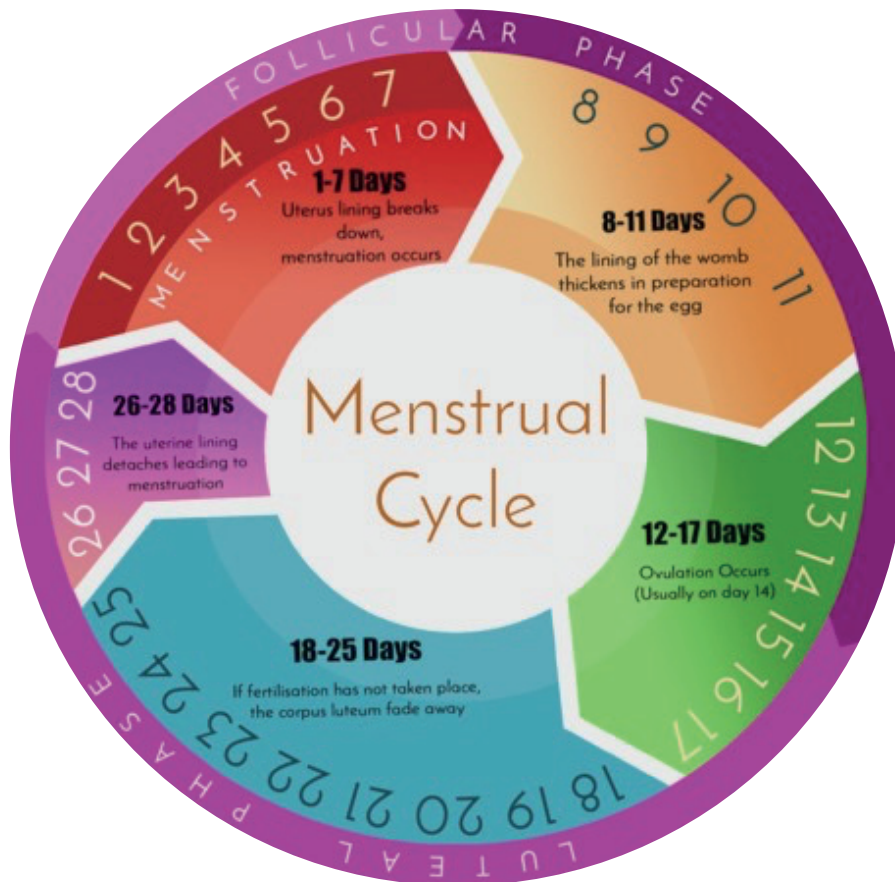


Handout – The menstrual cycle



Note: The above phases are estimated on an average 28-day cycle, but many people have longer or shorter menstrual cycles and some have irregular cycles.

Menstruation: from when the bleeding starts (first day of a period) to when the bleeding ends.

Ovulation: includes the phase when the egg (ovum) is released from one of the ovaries. Ovulation occurs 12–16 days before the next menstrual period begins and this is the most fertile time. A menstrual cycle can last from 21 to 40 days.

Post-Ovulation: the egg travels through the nearest fallopian tube into the uterus (womb). Meanwhile, the lining of the uterus continues to grow thick with blood and nutrient tissue. If the egg isn't fertilised by a male sperm cell, the lining will come away from the wall of the uterus and disintegrate. As it starts to leave your body, the whole cycle begins again with the menstrual phase, or menstrual period.

Factors that Influence Fertility

- The egg can survive for 12–24 hours.
- The sperm can survive for approximately 5 days.
- Some people have irregular cycles and others ovulate more than once during a month, thus there is really no safe time to have unprotected sex if you wish to prevent pregnancy.
- Factors that can change the cycle include: stress, smoking, exam pressures, poor diet, emotional upset, chronic illness, bereavement, a sexually transmitted infection, air travel, medication, shift work and excessive exercise.