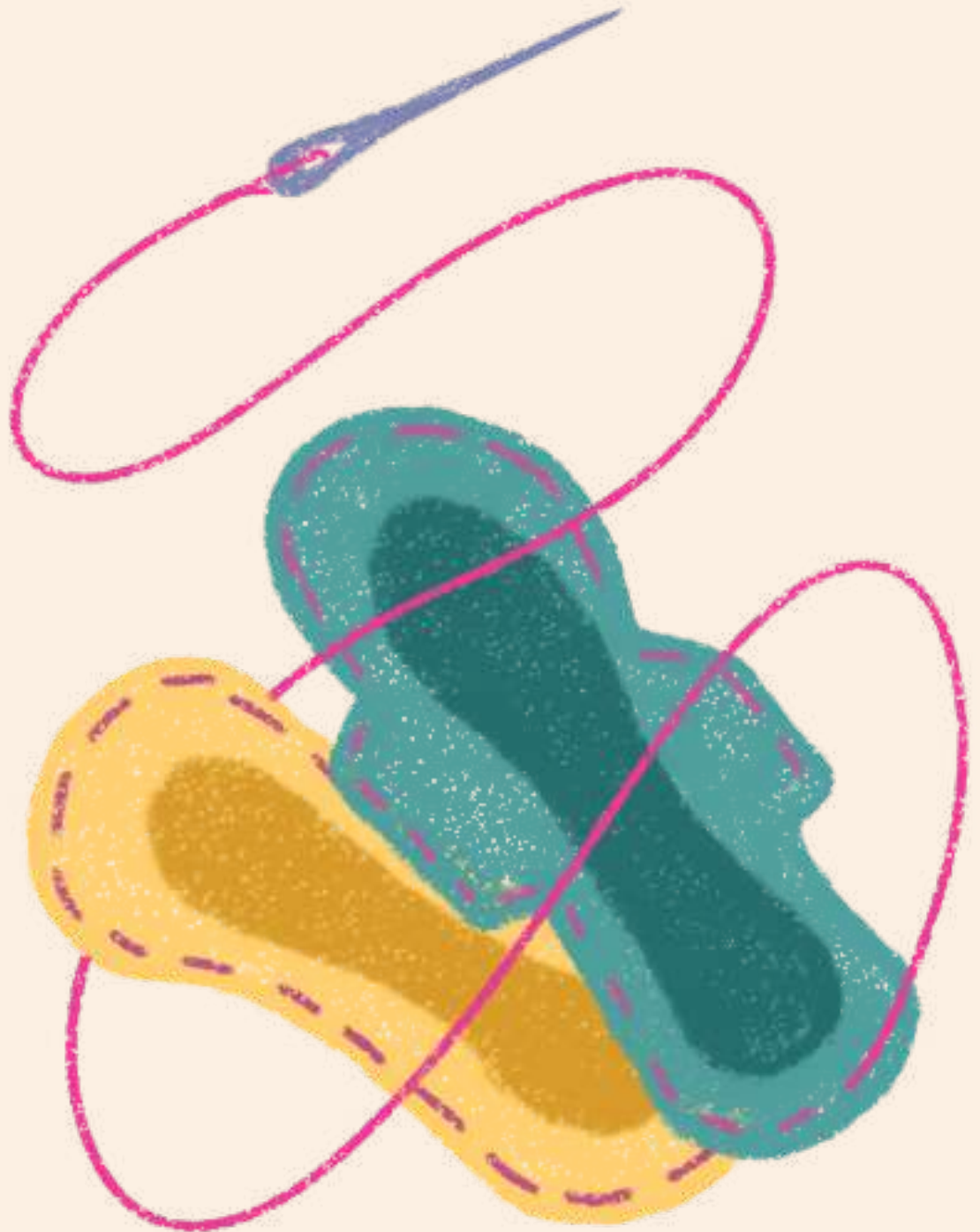


Pad Making

An extension to the period
educatio guide for gilrs



OBJECTIVE OF THIS BOOKLET

This booklet is an extension to the MHM education guide (Ruby's/ Rosie's/Sahara's/ Abeba's World) developed by WASH United. After you conducted a menstrual hygiene training with girls, we hereby want to address a very common problem girls face: they cannot afford disposable pads.

The objective of this Pad Making Booklet is to provide you as an organisation, trainer, teacher, or individual with guidance on how to set up a washable and reusable pad-making workshop with girls. You can even do this with other members of your community!

The booklet features the most common version of a washable, hand-made pad, which is a winged pad with three layers. The aim of the activity is that girls learn how to make a pad from scratch completely by themselves, so they can re-create it without supervision in the future.

This booklet has two parts:

1. Part one includes more information on reusable pads and guidance for conducting the workshop, such as the materials you need and the set-up. You will also find details of the most common mistakes to avoid and links with further information.
2. Part two centres around the workshop and includes the step-by-step guidance and stencils for the pads, and information on menstrual hygiene that you can share with girls.

If you have questions, please write to us at mhmguide@wash-united.org

This booklet was developed and tested by WASH United in partnership with Slum Soccer, India. Girls Pride, from the Gambia provided us with valuable feedback. Financial support was provided by GIZ.

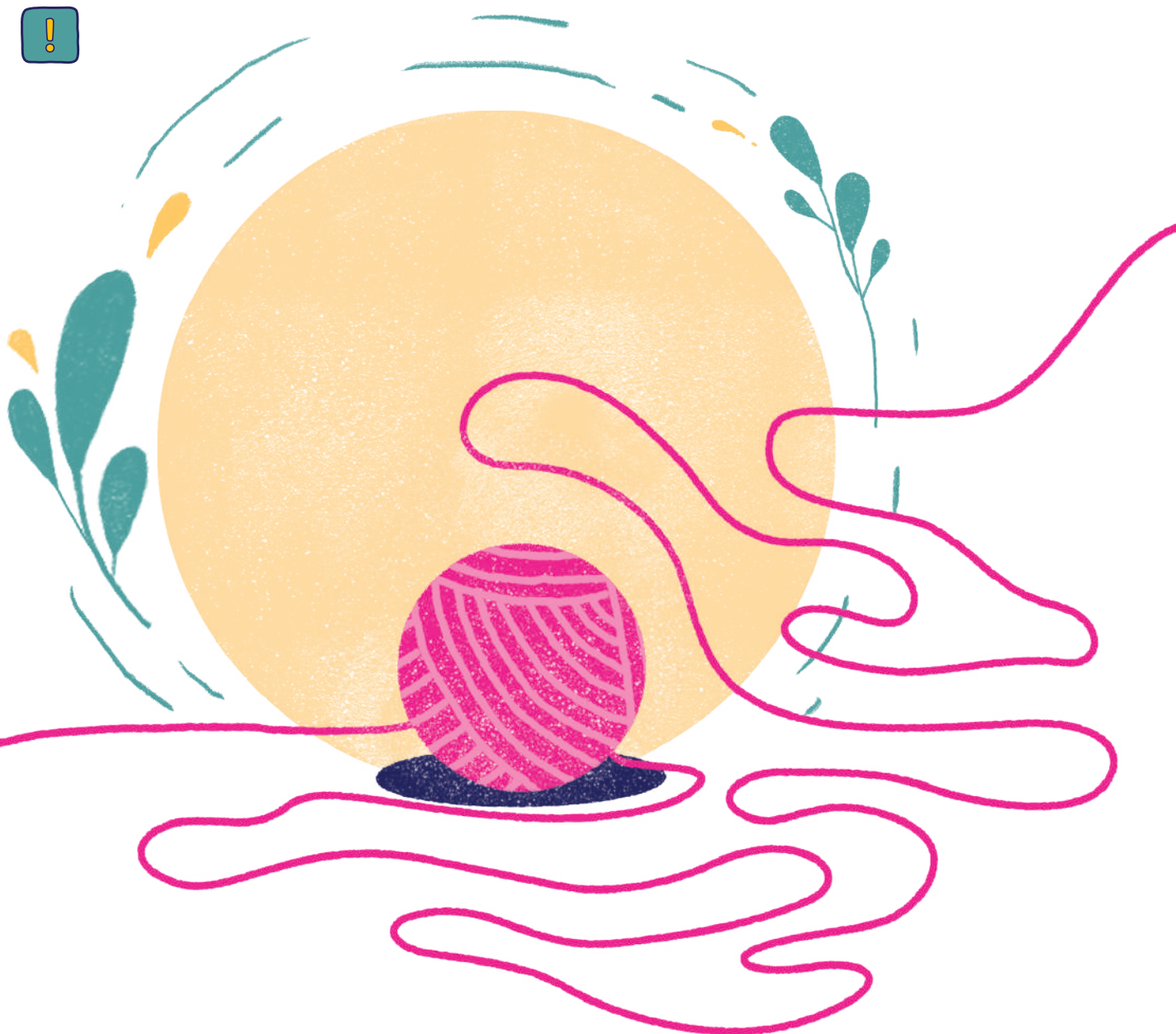


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PART 1 - WHY MAKE A WASHABLE, REUSABLE PAD?

Advantages of washable sanitary pads

A washable pad has the same shape as a disposable sanitary pad, just that it is made from cloth sewn together. It can be reused after washing and drying.

The advantage compared to cotton cloth is that it sits better in underwear and is less likely to move. Therefore, washable pads are more comfortable and reduce the risk of staining. The advantage over disposable sanitary pads is that they're cheaper in the long run because they can be re-used for around one year and there is no need to buy new pads every month. And because they can be re-used, they protect the environment and reduce waste.

Why make washable pads with girls?

Many girls lack the funds to buy disposable sanitary pads. Commercially produced washable cloth pads from local companies might not be available everywhere or may still be too expensive. So instead of using cloth or any other unsuitable materials, girls will have an affordable, reusable hygienic product at hand, which solves often key menstrual hygiene management problems.

When girls create something by themselves, with a nice fabric, it fosters a sense of pride in their skills and the beautiful product they've created. Furthermore, while stitching the pad, you have time to talk and discuss more about periods and menstrual hygiene. And even better: it's a sustainable intervention because you teach them the skills to create their own pads from now on. They can even gift pads to family members and friends.

Who can make a reusable pad?

Anyone can make a reusable pad! Young girls from the age of ten and upwards can participate. Boys, mothers, and community members can, too. This is also a great exercise in girls clubs and tailoring classes.

In the descriptions of the materials and steps we want to ensure even without access to a sewing machine¹, and with limited financial resources to buy materials, girls can create their own washable pads.

The only question is: **Do they know how to hand stitch?**

- If yes, great! You can start right away
- If no or not all of them, include enough time to demonstrate and practice the different stitches (see page 12) before you start making the pads. The results will be nicer, and the process will be more satisfying.



Tip: Create groups of girls with different stitching skills so they can support each other and learn together.



Tip: Encourage participants who are not making much progress in stitching that they should practice stitching at home.

¹If they have access to a sewing machine, making the pads will be faster and the pad will be sturdier. However, we considered that not everyone has access to a sewing machine.



LET'S START WITH PAD MAKING

PREPARATION AND SET-UP

The ideal group size is 10-20 girls. So that the girls can be adequately supervised, we recommend the number of participants is kept below 30.



Tip: Arrange girls in smaller working groups with different sewing skills (two-five girls), while they work on their own pads, they can support each other during the process.

You can create the pads indoors or even outdoors. However, we recommend having some tables for the girls to use while cutting the shapes and the fabric.

Bring all the materials with you (see next chapter).



Tip: Ideally you as the trainer should practice making your own pad beforehand, so you understand the process and can explain the steps well.

MODEL OF A THREE-LAYER WINGED SANITARY PAD

We chose the model of a three-layer winged pad where all layers are sewn together because it is a common and easy model to make.



We recommend creating the first pad with the initial shape provided in this booklet which is medium size. With some more experience and some practical testing of the initial pad, they can make following adjustments:

- Increase or decrease width and length
- Adjust shape of wings and shape of pad
- Increase or decrease the number of absorption layers
- Change materials to test different comfort levels

The first pad will probably not be great, so give them time to practice stitching and sew additional pads. They will get better and better because practice makes perfect.



WHAT MATERIALS DO I NEED?

For making one pad you need the following materials. Read on below for the exact specifications. Items marked with (*) can be shared in a group of two-five girls.

- Thread*
- A needle
- Fabric + bring some extra fabric for stitching practice
- A pair of scissors or fabric cutter*
- A fastening mechanism
- 2 sheets of A4 paper and a pen and a ruler or tapeline* and if you want pre-prepared stencils*
- Optional: approx. 10 pins



Tip: Bring one or more demonstration models, so that the girls can see how the final product will look.

Ideally source all the materials from the local market. This not only cuts down on costs and it is also more sustainable because the girls can easily find the same materials themselves later. While you can ask girls to bring their own materials, we recommend this only for the subsequent sessions after you have demonstrated which materials they can use.

Thread

- You can use average sewing thread (ideally cotton) – but for sewing it needs to be doubled to ensure durability.
- Embroidery thread is more expensive and too thick - but the strings can be untangled to extract smaller pieces of thread.

Needle

- The size of the needle matters! It shouldn't be too small because it will be tricky to sew but also not too large otherwise the holes between threads will be too big.
- We recommend needles around size 8-12.

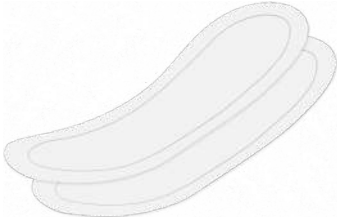
Fabric

- The pads have three layers, which require different fabrics. The fabric should be unused, clean and 100% cotton (except if you can find soft micro fleece or PUL for the absorbent layer). If you find organic cotton, even better.
- For each layer you need around A4 large piece of fabric – or around 30cm x 20 cm / 12"x 8".
- If you buy fabric from a roll, you can create several pads from it.
- Bring more fabric if you need to do some stitching practice first.



Tip: Remaining fabric can also be re-used to create small pouches for the pads.



Bottom layer: The fabric needs to be a bit sturdy. ■ Cotton fabric that is a bit sturdier. Traditional fabrics with a nice pattern are ideal.	
Absorbent middle layer: Chose materials that can absorb and prevent leakages. ■ Waterproof materials: Such as polyurethane laminate (PUL). We do not recommend using materials such as plastic bags because they brittle and make sounds. ■ Soft micro fleece. You need two or more layers depending on flow and material absorbency. ■ Soft and absorbent cotton: Like towels, fleece, or bamboo fibre. You need at least two layers, depending on flow and material absorbency.	
Top layer: Fabric needs to be soft to the skin as it is close to the vulva. The material should not peel off and it should not be too thin, otherwise it will tear after a few washes.	



Tip: Use a darker colour so the stains over time will be less visible.

- Soft micro Fleece or/and absorbent cotton. It can be the same material as the for the middle layer if it fulfils the condition above.
- Soft cotton jersey



Attention: Test the fabric prior to ensure that they don't lose colours when being washed. You should avoid fabric that has been impregnated with a water-repellent chemical or chemically treated such as tie dye. If you are afraid the material might shrink, also pre-wash and dry it before sewing.

Test the absorbency and comfort of your materials!

If you are not sure how absorbent and comfortable your materials are, make different models with two or three absorbent layers and different type of materials. Ask the girls to test the different strengths at home during different days of the period. Then they can identify which type of materials and thickness

Fastening mechanism

Different options include:

- Snap button or press stud (< 20 mm diameter) ideally a plastic one. But if you can find only metal, be aware that it could rust from the washing, and you need to replace it whenever it gets rusty!
- Button (< 20 mm diameter)
- Velcro (3 cm/ around 1")

Scissors / cutter

Ideally bring several big pairs of scissors or a cutter that are suitable for cutting fabric and paper. But you can also have small scissors for cutting the shape only.

Two sheets of A4 paper, a pen, a ruler or tapeline and/or pad shapes stencil

- Any type of paper will do, even newspaper, to create the stencils
- Or you can bring pre-prepared stencils ideally made from cardboard paper

Pins

Quality standards on washable pads

Most countries in low-and-middle income countries do not have a national standard for reusable, washable sanitary pads. The International Standard Organisation (ISO) is currently working on it, and it may be adopted then in your country in the future. As you are not a business, and these pads are locally handmade for personal use, you do not have to test and certify your pads.

However, it is good to be aware of some recommendations².

- **Visible appearance:** The product shall be visibly clean; free from obvious defects, lumps or wrinkles; without loose stitching; even wings
- **Performance:** Average absorbency capacity: 4- 30ml; average absorbency rate: 2 - 8 ml per min
- **Washing and durability:** Shall release stain quickly when washing by hand and shall dry even in the absence of sunlight; colour fastness; shall withstand 60 washes; drying in less than six hours when hung in direct sunlight

²These are relevant aspects that are similar in most existing standards or international guidelines. If you are interested here is an overview of what exists: <https://bit.ly/3vJowv7>

WORKSHOP SESSIONS AND TIME

Consider at least four to five hours for the workshop, best split between two days, so the girls have time to practice at home. But depending on the skills, the time can differ massively.

We recommend the following sessions:

■ Welcome and orientation: Advantages of reusable pads and how to use them	15-30 min
■ Stitching practice	30 min – 2 h
■ Preparations: Explain all the materials needed, draw the shapes together, cut the fabric	1 - 2 h
■ Stitching: Start stitching and finalise pad	2 - 4 h
■ Menstrual hygiene: How to use the pad, care instruction and re-emphasise on good menstrual hygiene practices	30 min - 1 h
■ Questions and answers: Throughout the sessions or at the very end	10- 30 min
■ (Optional) Practice: Adjust template and sew more pads	2 - 4 h



Tip: To keep up motivation, ensure to celebrate the small achievements. Maybe bring little sweets to hand out when the girls completed a step.

FIVE MOST COMMON MISTAKES WHEN MAKING PADS

1. Sourcing the wrong materials.
Solution: Buy a small quantity first to test the materials before buying in bulk.
2. Cutting the fabric right along the template and as a result the pad will be too small.
Solution: Consider leaving some inches for sewing.
3. Sewing too close to or too far from the edge. If it is too close: you might accidentally cut the stitch; if it is too far: the size of the pad will be smaller.
Solution: Stitch 0.5-1 cm / 0,2-0,4" from the edge.
4. Using too large stitches, the pad is less sturdy and there is space between the fabric.
Solution: Be patient and practice so you have neat and small stitches.
5. The materials do not fit well on top of each other, and the pad shape is not lined up well.
Solution: Pins are ideal to hold the fabric in place or some few larger stitches that can be removed once the final stitches are done.

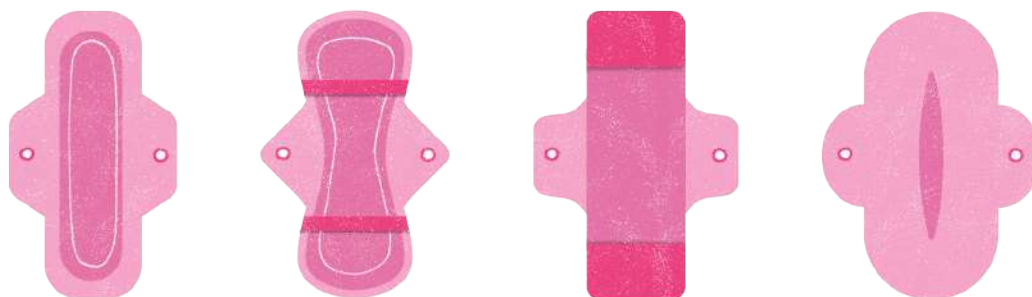


Attention: As a trainer, make sure to pay attention so that the girls don't injure themselves with scissors, needles, and pins.

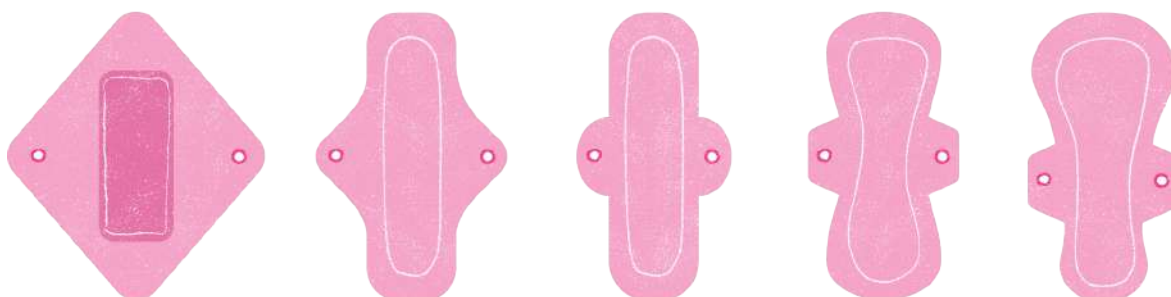
FURTHER RESOURCES

Alternative shapes and models

The model in this booklet is the all-in-one model because it is the easiest to follow. As second-best alternative, we recommend the wrap & insert model where the absorbent layer can be removed and exchanged separately. It is held in place either with strings or small pockets towards the end.



There are different models and shapes for handmade washable sanitary pads available. The more round the shape is, especially around the wings, it becomes more difficult to cut. Some pads shapes are slightly longer at one end, so they are suitable for night-time.



Videos and tutorials

There are plenty of resources available if you search the internet or YouTube. And while most of the pads are done with a sewing machine, hand stitching will work, too!

- Ask Pauline: Pauline's site follows the same steps as this booklet. The site includes a lot of other links.
<http://www.askpauline.com/crafts/pads/padspul/padspul.html>
- Seamworks: Step by step instruction including pattern making.
<https://www.seamwork.com/articles/how-to-sew-cloth-pads>
- Delivering Hope International: Winged wrap & insert model.
<https://bit.ly/3p2iNg7>
- Whitney Sews: Video with a similar process and a free pattern to download.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qi6GYPDsAqE&>
- Ode to Less:

PART 2

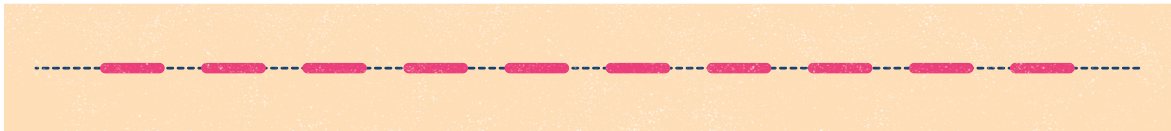
All you need for the pad making workshop. Including step-by-step guidance and stencils for

STITCHING PRACTICE

There are three different stitches that the girls should be able to master.

What you need: A needle, thread, and some small pieces of fabric

How to do it: Demonstrate each stitch one after the other, starting with the running stitch as it is the easiest, followed by the back stitch and the blanket stitch. Give them at least 15 minutes to practice each stitch before moving to the next stitch. Go from group to group to see how they are doing and provide extra support to those who are struggling.

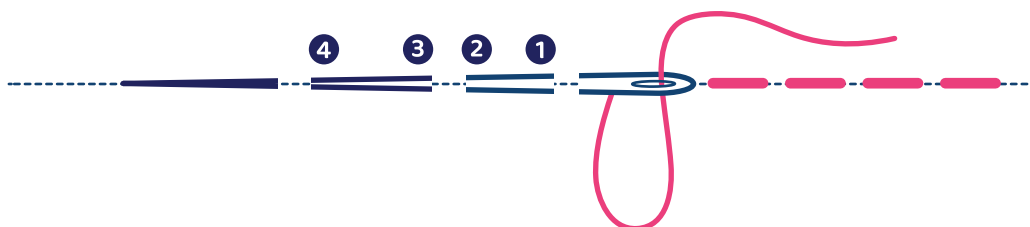


Tip: The stitches should be not too big, but straight and tight.

Running stitch:

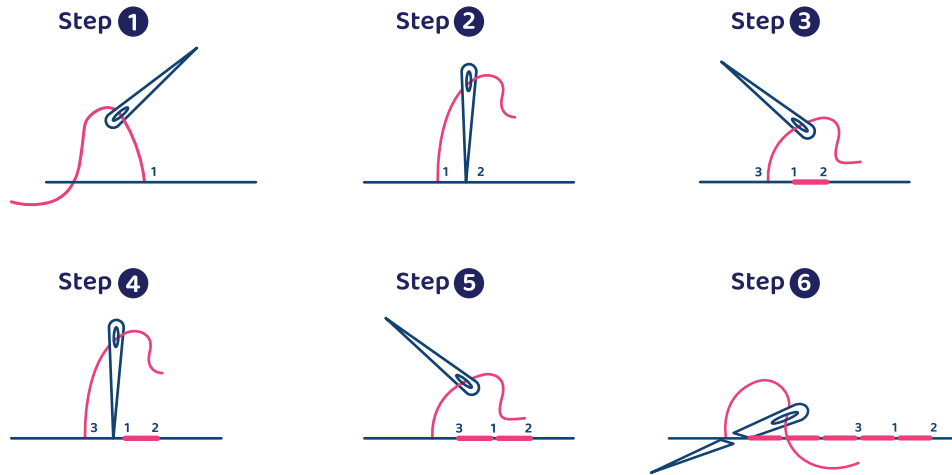
How to stitch: Going from one side to the other, take the needle in and out of fabric layers several times before pulling the knotted thread through.

The stitches and the empty space between them should be the same size –



The back stitch:

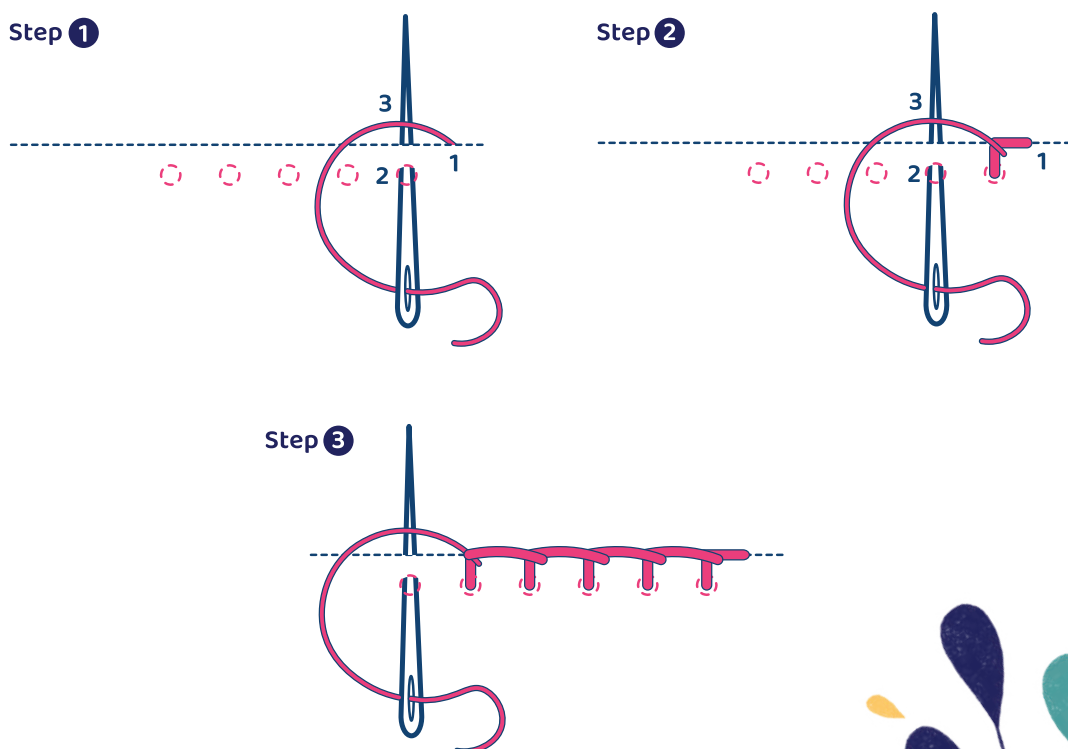
How to stitch: The knotted end of the thread should be under the fabric at the right end. Pull the thread out from underneath the fabric, then insert the needle behind where the thread comes out from, approx. 0,3- 0,5 cm / 0,1- 0,2". Bring the needle up through the fabric in a line in front of the previous stitch, keep the same distance as the previous stitch.



The blanket stitch

How to stitch: The knotted end of the thread should be behind the fabric at the right end. Stitch the needle to the front side of the fabric approx. 0,5 cm / 0,2" from the top. Loop the thread over the edge of the fabric and bring the needle to the front side of the fabric again through the same point where the thread comes out. Pass the needle under the loop over the fabric's edge to the left side.

For all the following stitches: Bring the needle through the front of the fabric keeping the needle pointing up towards the fabric's edge). Loop the thread behind the needle and pull the needle through (up). Then bring the needle again to the front approx. 0,3-0,5 cm / 0,1- 0,2" next to the previous one and continue.



STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1: Create your stencil shapes

What you need: 2 sheets of A4 paper, pen, a ruler, and a scissor

You need create two shapes that are your stencils for cutting the fabric (step 2).

- Shape one: Is for the bottom layer and top layer and has wings
- Shape two: Is for the middle, absorbent layer

There are 3 options:

Option 1: Draw the shape and the measurement of each shape on the board. Ask the girls to recreate the shape on their sheet of paper using the ruler. Start with the easy shape two and then one. Start in the centre of the paper and let them draw the horizontal width and then vertical length first.

Option 2: Have a pre-prepared stencil at hand and ask the girls to copy the shape on their A4 sheet of paper.

Option 3: Make photocopies of the handouts at the end of this booklet and distribute them to the girls. Then cut them out.

Step 2: Cut the fabric

What you need: your different fabrics, the two stencils and a scissor

Pick the respective fabrics and place the right stencil shape on each of the respective fabrics. Because the shapes are symmetrical, it doesn't matter which side is up or down. Maybe use pins to keep the stencil in place.

- Shape one: Bottom fabric
- Shape one: Top layer
- Shape two: Absorbent fabric (1 layer of PUL, or 2-3 layers for fleece or cotton)



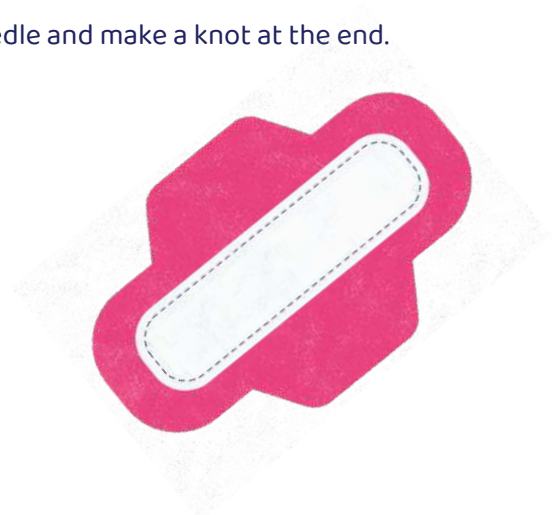
Attention: Make sure you cut 0,5 – 1 cm / 0,2-0,4" more fabric around the shape! If you cut exactly along the shape the final shape of the pad will be smaller.

Step 3: Thread your needle

Cut the yarn and put it double. Thread it through the needle and make a knot at the end.

Step 4: Sew the middle layer to the bottom fabric

Place the bottom shape with the right side/ pattern facing down. Place the absorbent layer(s) in the middle of the shape 2. Maybe use pins to keep it in place. Use the **running stitch** to sew the fabrics together following the outer edge of the middle layer. Try to keep also around 0,5 cm or 3/8" from the edge as seam allowance.

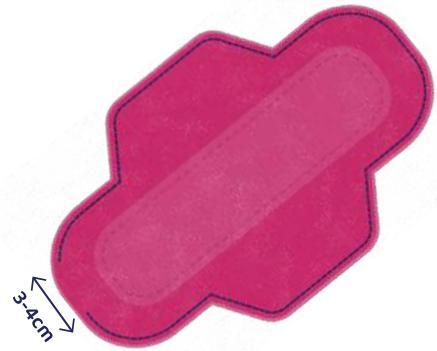


Step 5: Sew the top layer to the two combined layers

Place one piece on top of the other, with the right sides facing each other. Maybe use pins to keep them together. Now use the **back stitch** to sew the shapes together keeping around 0,5 cm or 3/8" space from the edge as seam allowance.



Attention: Keep around 3- 4 cm/ 2" not sewn together because you need this for the next step! If you notice too much fabric standing out at the sides, you can cut it off.



Step 6: Now turn the pad inside out!

Through the opening, turn the pad inside out! Move and wiggle it a bit so the pad comes into the right shape including the corners of the wings.



Tip: Use a pen to squeeze the fabric through.



Step 7: Close the opening

Use the **blanket stitch** to close the opening.

Step 8: Add the fastening mechanism

What you need: fastening mechanism

Mark the place where your fastening mechanism will be placed approx. 1cm from the edge of each wing. Make sure they are in line horizontally. Then stitch it on.



Tip: Use some loose stitches first to see if your fastening mechanism align well on both sides, then finish stitching.



Step 9: Wash and iron it or dry it completely before the first use!

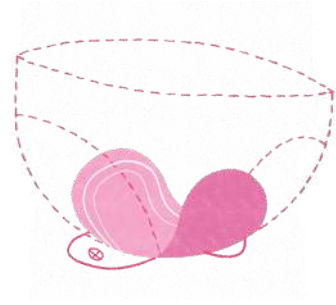
Resist the temptation of using it directly!



HOW TO MAINTAIN A GOOD MENSTRUAL HYGIENE

? How to wear my reusable pad?

All pads have wings that have a fastening mechanism to secure the pad in place. To wear the reusable menstrual pad, place it in your underwear, wrap the wings under, and close the snap button, button or Velcro to hold it in place. Wash your hands with soap and water before touching the pad and after you changed it.



? How long can I wear it?

This depends on the comfort and the absorbency of your material and on how heavy your flow is on that day. The best way to get familiar with how long you can wear is to test your pad.

- Recommended time is to change it every 4 to 6 h
- Maximum wearing time is six hours
- Wearing it longer will increase bacteria growth, which may provoke odours and makes the pad unhygienic and then can cause infections and irritation of your vulva

For an overnight use, you could use only one pad. You generally bleed less during night-time. In case your flow is heavy overnight, you can also create a larger or thicker night-time pad.

? How to wash it?

1. Rinse and soak the pad in cold, and clean water first for some minutes so that most of the blood comes out. It's easier if you do this when the blood is still fresh.
2. Soak it for at least 5 minutes in cold or lukewarm water.
3. Wash the pad with a detergent or with soap. Wash it the same way you would usually wash your underwear. When available, wash it in a washing machine at 40°.
4. Finally, rinse it with cold water until the water is clear.

Do not wash it with hot water, because then the blood will clot, and it will make it harder to remove. Do not use bleach or soda! The pad is close to your vulva, and it will provoke irritations and unhealthy conditions.

? How to dry it?

Ideally dry the pad on a washing line exposed to the sun. If you do not want others to see it, put a light material over it. If you can only dry the pad indoors, dry it as much as possible hanging on a rope. Do not place it on the floor to dry. Stretch the pad so it gets the original shape.

Heat is necessary for extra safety to eliminate remaining bacteria and sunshine is the best!

In terms of ironing your pad: If you only use cotton fabric it's no problem, when you use fleece materials you can iron it carefully on a low temperature, for water repellent /PUL do not iron it as it might destroy the fabrics functionality.

? When can I use it again?

The pad needs to be completely dry before you use it again!





? How to store it?

Store your pads in a hygienic, cool, and dry place. You can store the clean pads in your purse, any bag, clean containers, scarves, anywhere that it is dry and clean. Keep your pads in the same place as all your other valuable belongings! Do not put it under the mattress or an unhygienic corner or a moist place. You will risk a fungal infection. And keep it away from dust and children.

? How many reusable pads do I need for my period?

This depends on how long your period lasts, how heavy your period is, how absorbent your pad is and how fast you can dry it completely. Consider having at least four pads per menstrual cycle, but six or more is even better!

? When shall I not use them anymore? And how to dispose them?

When the top layer is torn and/or stiff, or you cannot clean it properly anymore, it is time to dispose of the pad and make a new one.

We recommend **to not use it longer than one year.**

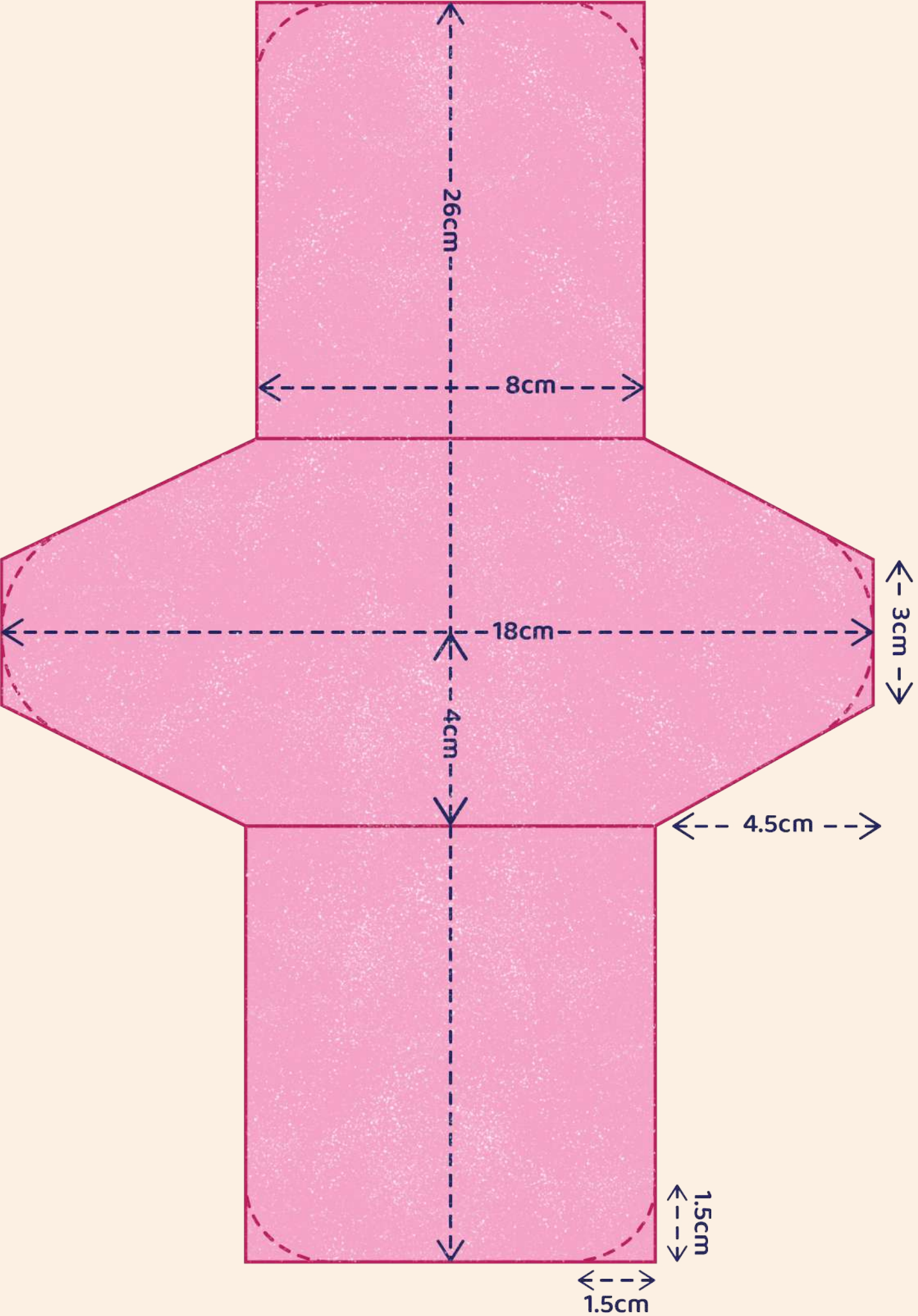
To dispose of it, wrap it in paper and dispose it together with your normal household garbage. If there is no proper household garbage collection, you can bury the pad. But do not wrap it in

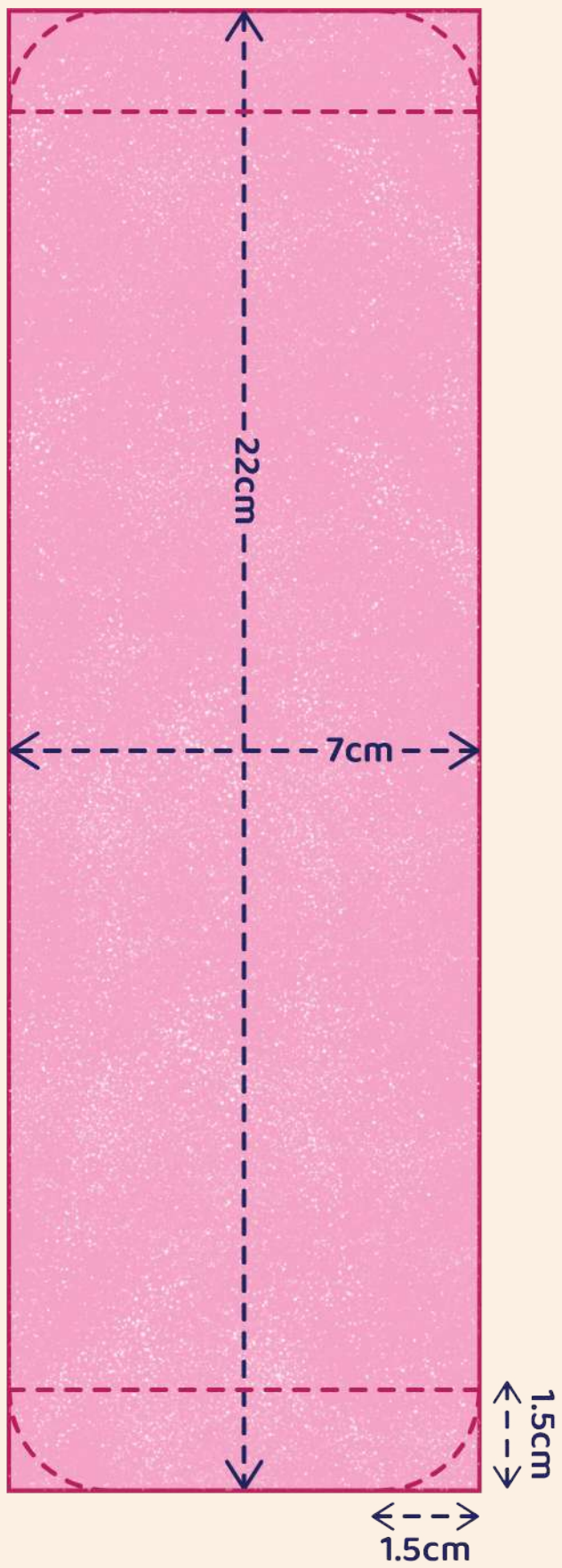


Do not share pads that have been used before!
Instead, why don't you create pads for friends and family!?



Periods are nothing to be ashamed of!
By making your own pads, you show that you care about yourself,





HOW TO MAINTAIN GOOD HYGIENE

HOW TO WEAR:

- Place the pad inside your underwear and secure the fastening mechanism
- Wash your hands with soap and water before and after changing your pads
- Wear for 4-6 hours depending on your flow but not longer than 6 hours

WASHING INSTRUCTIONS:

- Pour cold water over the used pad to wash off the blood
- Soak in lukewarm water for at least 5 minutes. Do not soak in hot water
- Use detergent or soap without chemicals to wash the same way you wash your underwear
- Dry under sunlight or iron the pad if it was dried indoors to kill micro-organisms/bacteria

HYGIENE SAFETY

- Allow the pad to dry completely before reuse
- Do not bleach or wash pads with soda

STORAGE:

- Store them in a hygienic, cool, and dry place
- Ideally keep the pads in a storage bag

FINAL DISPOSAL METHOD:

- Maximum usage is one year
- Dispose when the top layer is torn and/or becomes stiff
- Wrap the cleaned pads in a paper and dispose them in a bin with your normal household garbage



HOW TO SEW YOUR OWN PAD

Step 1: Create your stencil shapes

- Shape one: winged form
- Shape two: rectangle form

Step 2: Cut the fabric –with 0,5 – 1 cm / 0,2-0,4 " more around the shape!

- Shape one: Bottom and top layer
- Shape two: Absorbent layer (1 layer of PUL, or 2-3 layers for fleece or cotton)

Step 3: Thread your needle

Step 4: Sew the middle layer to the bottom fabric with the running stitch

Step 5: Sew the top layer to the two combined layers with the backstitch

Place the shape on top of the other with the right sides facing each other.
Keep around 3- 4 cm/ 2" not sewn together!

Step 6: Now turn the pad inside out

Step 7: Close the opening with the blanket stitch

Step 8: Add the fastening mechanism

