An easy illustration guide to understanding Menstruation, Menstrual Hygiene Management and the link to Mental health



My Little Red Book

(A menstrual Hygiene Pamphlet)

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The Red Book

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A Note to You

Dear Adolescent,

Welcome to The Little Red Book, your guide to understanding and navigating the exciting, yet sometimes confusing, world of adolescent mental and menstrual health. This book is designed to provide you with accurate information, practical tips, and support as you embark on this important phase of your life.

Remember, it's okay to feel overwhelmed, curious, or even a little scared. You're not alone. Many young people like you have gone through similar experiences. By learning about your body and mind, you can better understand yourself and take care of your overall well-being.

We hope that The Little Red Book becomes a valuable resource for you. Feel free to explore its pages at your own pace and don't hesitate to share it with your friends and family.

Thank you to the EMpower Foundation and all the experts who contributed their knowledge and time to create this book. Your dedication and expertise have made it possible to provide this important information to young people.

With care,

Dorothy Njemanze Foundation

Let's ensure that every girl and boy receives education about menstrual hygiene. This will empower girls to maintain smooth and healthy well-being during menstruation and inspire boys to become better health support systems.



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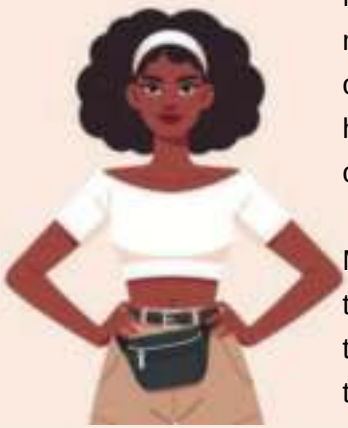
What is Menstruation?



Menstruation is a girl or woman's monthly bleeding, often called "period" or "Menses." When she menstruates, her body discards the monthly buildup of the lining of her uterus (womb).

Menstrual blood and tissue flow from the uterus through the small opening in the cervix and pass out of her body through the vagina.

Usually, when someone is pregnant, they don't have periods. So, if you're having regular periods, it typically means you're not pregnant.

Bodies can be tricky sometimes! A few things to keep in mind are that some people might have a little spotting when they first become pregnant, which isn't a real period but can look similar. If your periods aren't very regular yet (which is common for teens), it might be harder to tell if you've missed one. Also, sometimes, stress or other health stuff can make your period late or make you skip one, even if you're not pregnant. Very rarely, someone might have bleeding that looks like a period while pregnant.



What is Menstrual Cycle?



This is the time from the first day of your menstrual period until the first day of your next menstrual period.

During this period, your body undergoes different phases:
The menstrual phase, Follicular phase, Ovulation phase and Luteal phase.

The menstrual phase (menstruation):
The menstrual cycle phase is the part commonly referred to as 'your period'. The official start of the cycle is the first day of a menstrual phase – the first day of the period.

Menstrual blood is shed from the lining of your uterus. It goes from the uterus through your cervix and vagina and then out through the vaginal opening. Menstruation usually lasts about three to seven days.

Sanitary pads, tampons, period underwear or menstrual cups can be used to collect your period.

The follicular phase:
The follicular phase starts on the first day of your period and lasts for 13 to 14 days, ending in ovulation. The pituitary gland in the brain releases a hormone to stimulate the production of follicles on the surface of an ovary. Usually, only one follicle will mature into an egg. This can happen from day 10 of your cycle. During this phase, your uterus lining also thickens in preparation for pregnancy.

The Ovulation phase:

Let's discuss ovulation, a fascinating process in your reproductive cycle. It occurs when a mature egg is released from an ovary and moves along the fallopian tube towards your uterus. This typically occurs once a month, about two weeks before your next period. The ovulation phase can last from 16 to 32 hours.

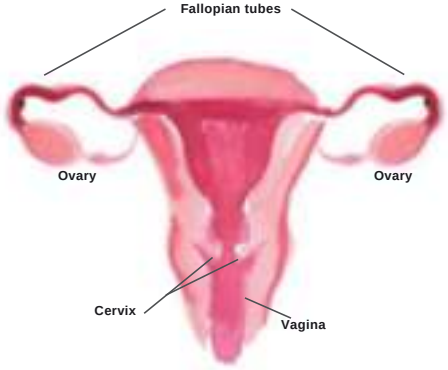
It is possible to get pregnant during the five days before ovulation and on the day of ovulation. Once the egg is released, it will survive up to 24 hours. If a sperm reaches the egg during this time, you may get pregnant.

The Luteal phase:

After ovulation, cells in the ovary release progesterone and a small amount of estrogen. This causes the uterus lining to thicken in preparation for pregnancy.

If a fertilised egg implants in the uterus's lining, the corpus luteum continues to produce progesterone, which maintains the thickened uterus lining.

If pregnancy does not occur, the corpus luteum dies, progesterone levels drop, the uterus lining sheds, and the period begins again.





Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

Premenstrual Syndrome is a group of symptoms (physical, emotional, and behavioral) that occurs 5 days before menstruation begins and goes away within 4 days after menstruation.

Symptoms may include:

- Acne breakouts
- Mood swings
- Tender breasts
- Menstrual pain
- Food cravings
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Depression.



Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)

Menstrual hygiene management refers to the specific hygiene requirements of women and girls during menstruation. These requirements include using sanitary materials to absorb or collect blood, having access to sanitation and washing facilities, and possessing accurate knowledge about menstruation.

Menstrual Hygiene Checklist:

- Use and change sanitary pads every 4-6 hours during menstruation.
- Wash hands and bathe with soap after using the toilet or changing pad to avoid infection.
- Please make sure to discard sanitary products properly. Used pads should always be wrapped in paper, placed in the bin, or burned. Please don't flush it down the toilet.
- Bathe regularly.
- Do not use soaps or vaginal hygiene products. Use mild soap on the external genitalia (vulva), but never in your vagina.
- Stay dry by changing your wet sanitary pad frequently as necessary to avoid rash and infection.
- Wear comfortable clothing e.g. cotton panties and loose clothing to allow air flow and prevent sweating.
- Depending on your flow, carry an extra pad during your period



Discard sanitary products properly



Use and change Sanitary Pads every 4-6 hours



Wash hands and bathe with soap Regularly



Change pants at intervals

What are Menstrual products?

Menstrual Products are sanitary materials used to absorb the menstrual flow (blood) after the blood leaves the body.

External protection products are pads, period panties, and panty liners.

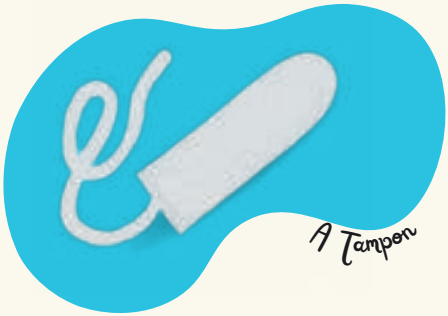
Internal Protection products include tampons and menstrual cups, which are inserted into the vagina.



Sanitary Pad



Menstrual Cup



A Tampon

WHAT'S INSIDE A MENSTRUAL HYGIENE KIT?



FEMALE UNDERWEAR (PANTY)



DISPOSABLE SANITARY PADS



CLOTHES PEGS + STRING



MENSTRUAL CUPS

BATH SOAPS





DETERGENT/ WASHING POWDER



REUSABLE SANITARY PADS



TAMPONS

Washable and Reusable Sanitary Pad



These are reusable alternatives to standard disposable pads. Reusable menstrual pads are cloth pads that can be washed and reused several times. They can absorb menstrual blood and can be worn for about 4-5 hours, depending on your menstrual flow.

After use, you need to wash the cloth thoroughly and dry it in the sun to remove any blood stains, and then it can be reused.

Washable and Reusable Sanitary Pad Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



Are reusable pads safe for use?

Yes! Reusable pads are healthy for use. They tend to be more breathable. They are also made with odour-fighting cotton fabrics that prevent leaks while keeping you healthy and feeling fresh. Make sure you properly wash your pad after each use.

How do you wash a used reusable pad?

Washing your reusable pad takes a 2 step cleaning process. First, rinse the pad in cool water until the water runs clear. Then, wash like you would usually wash other clothing. It is important to always check and read the care label of your reusable sanitary pad pack. Following specific care instructions will prolong the shelf life of your reusable pad.

How long can you wear a reusable pad?

You can wear a reusable pad for up to 6 hours, but you may have to change it more frequently if you have a heavy flow and the pad is full.

Menstrual Hygiene Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



In what direction should you wash your genital area?

As you wash, be careful to clean all the creases and folds around your vagina. Gently spread your outer labia (the large, fleshy pads or “lips” on the outside of your vulva) and wipe around the skin folds inside, making sure to wash around the hood of your clitoris and the area outside the entrance to your vagina.

Try not to get any soap inside your vagina itself since this can be drying and irritating.

Cleanse your anal area last. Once you’re done washing your vulva, move to your perineum (the area between your vagina and anus) and then your anus and the area between your buttocks. Always move from front to back while you are washing so that you don’t spread germs from your anal area into your vagina.

Menstrual Hygiene Freqiently Asked Questions (FAQ)

If you use a pad for the night and sleep for about eight hours, should you get up every four hours to change it?

The frequency of pad changes depends on your flow and comfort level. If your flow is heavy, you should use a pad that's designed for overnight heavy flow use, it should be able to handle your flow for 8 hours without causing discomfort or leaks. However, if you're feeling uncomfortable or notice a lot of leakage, it's best to change your pad more

Can you flush sanitary products down the toilet?

No.



Boys and Periods





Do boys really need to learn about periods?

Yes! If boys learn about periods, they will grow up more compassionate towards their mothers, sisters, friends, and all the future women in their lives. Boys need to be aware of what the girls and women around them are going through. This will reduce the incidents of misinformation and teasing about periods.

They don’t get periods, but the girls and women in their lives do. And that in itself is a good enough reason for them to know about periods.

How can boys help during periods?

Here are suggestions on how boys can help during periods.

If a family member (your mother, sister, cousin, etc.) or friend is menstruating, show understanding and support. Consider assisting them in buying sanitary supplies if they cannot get them.

If you notice a girl with a period stain on her dress, please let her know about the stain. Don't make fun of her to avoid embarrassing her



Boys can support girls on their periods by avoiding insensitive comments or jokes, respecting their privacy, and offering support and understanding when needed. Creating a culture of respect and dignity can help girls feel comfortable and confident during their menstrual cycles.

What is Mental Health?

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, learn well, work well and contribute to their community.

How is menstrual and mental health linked?

Below are some of the ways in which menstrual and mental health could be linked.

Changes that occur during menstruation can greatly impact a young person's emotional well-being, these changes associated with puberty, such as acne breakouts and changes in breast size, can lead to teasing and bullying. During menstruation, girls are more sensitive to stress, rejection or criticism, leading to feelings of self-consciousness, shame, and low self-esteem.

Physical Changes:

- Adolescents with acne breakouts get teased a lot because of the breakouts.
- Adolescents experiencing an increase in breast size could get taunted for their new breast size, while some get taunted because their breasts do not seem to be growing like those of their mates.
- Boys generally think it is time to avoid females. It is wrong because females are not another kind of creature during their periods, so relating usually would help reduce the chances of them feeling uncomfortable or feeling the need to hide.

- **Menstrual Pain**: Different adolescents experience varying levels of menstrual pain. Some may not experience any discomfort at all, while others may experience severe cramps. This can lead to feelings of frustration and isolation, especially if others do not understand and judge their experiences.
- **Food Cravings**: Hormonal changes can lead to intense food cravings, which can be particularly challenging for adolescents who may not have easy access to food.
- **Fatigue**: The physical demands of menstruation can cause feelings of fatigue, which can be misinterpreted as laziness or lack of motivation. This can make it difficult for adolescents to participate in activities with their peers and most times, they lack the words to explain it to their parents or wards.
- **Inability to Afford Sanitary Products**: For many adolescents, the cost of sanitary products can be a significant financial burden. This can lead to feelings of stress and anxiety, as well as a lack of access to necessary hygiene supplies.
- **Mood swings**: Adolescents may experience irritability, sadness, or anxiety during certain phases of their menstrual cycle. These are caused by hormonal fluctuations and often, they are misinterpreted by others and most adolescents do not understand why this is happening.
- **Social withdrawal**: Some adolescents may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about their menstrual cycle, leading to social isolation.
- **Unsupportive Parents or Home Environments**: A supportive home environment is crucial for adolescent mental health. Feeling safe, loved, and accepted can help to mitigate the negative impacts of menstruation.

For example, In Nigeria, the practice of virginity testing by guardians is unfortunately prevalent, causing significant emotional distress and trauma for adolescents. This practice violates their bodily autonomy, leading to feelings of shame, embarrassment, and isolation. Many adolescents who experience this struggle to cope with the psychological impact, potentially leading to depression, anxiety, and even self-harm.

It's important to note that not all adolescents experience these challenges to the same degree.
Some may have a relatively smooth experience with menstruation, while others may face significant difficulties. However, understanding the potential link between menstrual health and mental health can help to provide support and resources to young people who are struggling.
By fostering open communication about menstruation and providing information about the physical and emotional changes that occur during this time, we can help to reduce stigma and promote positive mental health outcomes for adolescents.

Tips to Reduce Menstrual Health-Linked Mental Health Challenges:

- Talking openly about menstruation can help to reduce stigma and promote understanding.
- Practicing self-care techniques, such as relaxation exercises, mindfulness, and healthy eating, can help to manage stress and improve mental well-being.
- If you're struggling with menstrual-related challenges, don't hesitate to seek support from a trusted adult, counsellor, or healthcare provider or call this number
  07013333307, 08147553343

PERIOD TRACKING

Tracking your menstrual cycle means recording when you're menstruating and documenting other information related to your cycle.

You can do this with a calendar and pen by marking on a calendar the first day of bleeding with a slash (/) or check mark (✓)

The cycle length is measured from day one, which is the first day of your period to the first day of your following period. The average cycle for most adolescent girls and women is 28 days, although anything from 21 to 35 days is standard in adult women.

How to calculate your next menstrual cycle

- **Start counting on the first day of your period:** This will accurately represent your menstrual cycle.
- **Count up to the day before you start your next period:** Your count resets on day 1 of your menstrual cycle. This means that your count for each cycle should end on the day before your next period. Include a count for the day before your period starts, but do not include the start date of your period, even if it starts later in the day.
- **Monitor your cycle for at least 3 months.** Although your menstrual cycle may differ from month to month, monitoring it for at least three months will accurately show your average cycle length.

- **Calculate your average cycle length:** To find the average, add the total number of your cycle days for each month that you have monitored. and the timing.Then, divide that total by the number of months you monitored. This will give you your average cycle length.

    - *For example, you had a 28 day cycle in April, a 30 day cycle in May, a 26 day cycle in June, and a 27 day cycle in July, your average would be (28+30+26+27)/4, equalling a 27.75 day average cycle.*

- **Continue to track your cycle:** Keep tracking your cycle every month throughout your life. This can help you know when something is off. Medical professionals often ask for information about your cycle, as well. Monitoring your periods and cycle length will help you provide the most accurate information possible. If your doctor asks you the date of your last period, the answer is the first day of your last period, not the day it ended.

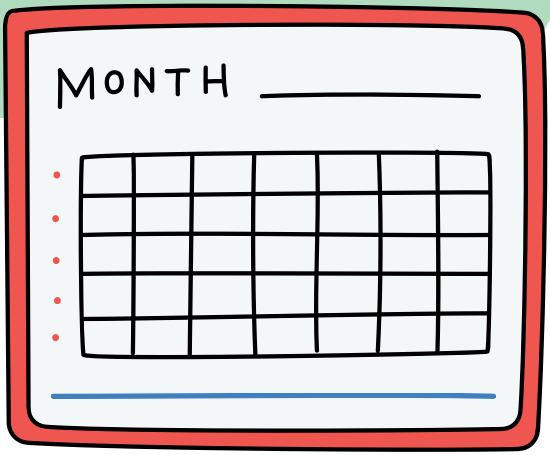
PERIOD TRACKER

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: Why do I need a period tracker?
A: A period tracker allows you to log details about your menstrual cycle, including period dates, blood flow, and symptoms such as mood, food cravings, headaches, acne, or cramps.

Q: What are the benefits of using a period tracker?
A: Imagine having a tool that helps you better understand your body's natural rhythm. Period cycle tracking can do just that. It provides a biological basis for understanding the timing of ovulation, fluctuating mood, and your period. This helps you know your menstrual cycle patterns, detect irregularities or changes that may warrant a doctor's visit, and plan activities or events around your menstrual cycle.

Q: Can I customize a period tracker?
A: Yes, you can customize a period tracker to suit your personal preferences or needs. You can add or remove columns, change colors or labels, and tailor them to your specific tracking requirements.



My Period tracker

Year_____

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LIGHT ☐ MEDIUM ☐

HEAVY ☐ CRAMPS ☐

HEADACHE ☐ BACK PAIN ☐

ACNE ☐ SPOTTING ☐

TIRED ☐ _____

_____ _____

☐ ☐

_____ _____

☐ ☐

_____ _____

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_____ _____

Notes

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GLOSSARY

Compassionate: feeling or showing sympathy and sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others, and wanting to help them.

Cramps: pains in the lower stomach caused by a person's period.

Cervix: The lower, narrow end of the uterus (womb) that connects the uterus to the vagina.

Craving: a powerful desire for something.

Discard: get rid of (someone or something) as no longer useful or desirable.

Discomfort: a feeling of being uncomfortable physicallyor mentally, or something that causes this.

Dignity: the state or quality of being worthy of honour or respect.

Follicle: a structure like a small bag in a woman's ovary.

Frustration: the feeling of being upset or annoyed as a result of being unable to change or achieve something.

Fascinating: extremely interesting.

Fallopian tube: One of two long, slender tubes that connect the ovaries to the uterus. Eggs pass from the ovaries, through the fallopian tubes, to the uterus.

Foster: encourage the development of (something, especially something desirable).

Isolation: the state of being alone.

Leakage: an occurrence in which something (such as a liquid or gas) passes through a hole in a surface.

Misinformation: Misinformation is “false information that is spread, regardless of intent to mislead.

Ovary: A female reproductive organ in which eggs are produced.

Pituitary gland: The pituitary gland makes, stores and releases hormones. The pituitary gland is located at the base of your brain.

Progesterone: Progesterone is a hormone that supports menstruation and pregnancy. It typically rises during pregnancy and while using some birth control medications.

Privacy: a state in which one is not observed or disturbed by other people.

Prevalent: Something prevalent is common in a particular place at a particular time. Prevalent things are hard to avoid. When you see the word prevalent, think "It's everywhere!"

Sanitation: the process of keeping places free from dirt, infection, disease, etc., by removing waste, trash and garbage etc.

Spotting: Spotting refers to any bleeding from the vagina that is not due to the monthly menstrual cycle.

Trauma: severe and lasting emotional shock and pain caused by an extremely upsetting experience, or a case of such shock happening.

Uterus: The pear-shaped organ in a woman's pelvis. The uterus is where a fetus (unborn baby) develops and grows. Also called womb.



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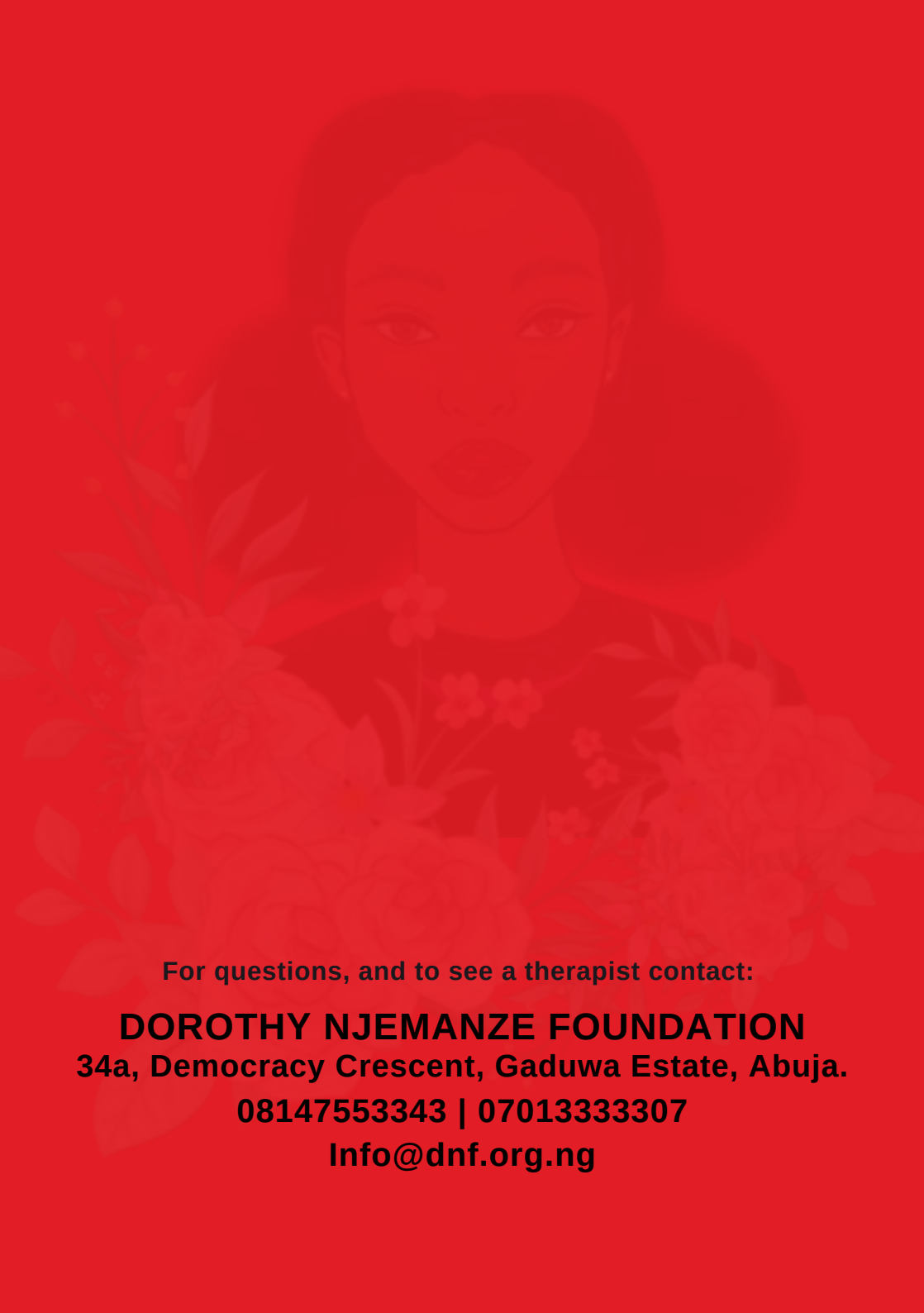

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