



**access-health
project mwezi**

training pack



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Re-Usable
Re-Cycled
Re-Purposed
Re-Emphasise
Re-Formation
Re-Create
Re-Equip

The vision of this project is to free girls and women from the disruptions that menstruation brings to their lives.

The Mwezi sanitary towel design can be made by anyone anywhere using materials found across any local market.

We provide practical training and health education to put control into the hands of the women.

Millions girls in Africa do not have access to any form of sanitary protection, obstructing good education, economic and social activities. This does not only affect an individual's life and career prospects; it affects the entire community they live.

In desperation girls will find local substitutions to sanitary wear such as old and dirty material, newspaper, leaves, and cow-dung. All of these options can cause infection and do not stop the problem of leaking. Commercial, disposable sanitary towels are often unavailable or too expensive, bulky to transport and difficult to dispose of hygienically.

There is very little formal support, education or understanding about puberty and sexual health. Fear, superstition, and embarrassment about body changes leads to low self-esteem. Sex can be used as payment for towels and even planned pregnancy in under-aged girls is used to avoid monthly menstruation. Therefore, girls are more prone to dropping out of school, pregnancy and sexual transmitted diseases.



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Big Problem. Simple Solution.

Cheap

Taught to anybody

Culturally appropriate

Income generating

Spread virally

Project Mwezi provide practical training and health education for individuals and groups who can further train their communities. This project targets those girls who are missing school up to 50 days per year due to their monthly bleeds, encouraging educational equality between girls and boys. Commercial pads are out of reach for millions of girls but these skills to make this sanitary towel are accessible to everybody reaching even those in marginalized communities.

This pack can be used as a tool to guide discussion and learning about puberty, reproductive health and family planning; creating a unique opportunity for students to explore social issues and talk about their bodies.

This pack includes step-by-step instructions on how to make, use and care for the reusable Mwezi sanitary towel. This is an affordable, durable, environmentally sound solution that can be made by girls or women within their own homes.

The women we work with are co-producers rather than customers. We offer knowledge and training, rather than a product. We work through existing community links, sharing knowledge that is brought back to the grass roots to help facilitate the best designs. The Mwezi sanitary towel is an open design that can be made, adapted and sold by anyone.



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The viral spreading, open-sourced project design is not only a fast efficient way of spreading knowledge but it allows Project Mwezi to collaborate with many individuals, projects and communities in different areas of the world.

The sanitary towel design is not fixed and girls are encouraged to tailor it to their own size, shape, menstrual flow and skin type. Individuals will be able to easily repair and replace personal pads, and it is possible for some girls to create a small income by selling them. This towel can be made and used as the first line protection or can be available as back-up when other options are not accessible.

This is an innovative approach that distributes knowledge and skills, and like the pads, it is long lasting and sustainable.

This teaching will make sure Girls:

Attend School



Better Grades



Save Money



**Increase
Self-Esteem**



**CHOICE
STAY HEALTHY
BRIGHTER FUTURE**



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The Cloth Sanitary Towel: Good for You and the Environment

Better for the Environment

Recycled material and No packaging,
No deposition in landfill,
No chemicals,
No high energy-input creation process.

No Health Risk

Safer than any local substitute e.g. Leaves, paper, cow dung,
Quick drying design,
No fibre loss or leaching chemicals,
Do not over absorb and cause dryness and ulcers,
No irritation from gelling chemical in commercial pads.

Cost effective

Cloth pads can last 2 years or more,
Easily repaired and replicated by users.

Easy to make and use

Can be made without a sewing machine or tailoring skills,
Easy to wash and dry.

Comfortable reliable and convenient

Cloth pads are soft, leak resistant and friction free,
Adapted to personal flow,
No reliance on imports or supply chains.

Empower women and girls

You are in control!



Menstruation and Puberty

Menstruation and the body changes during puberty is an experience for all female adolescence. This can be a time of fear and confusion for girls. Blood often has negative connotations of disease and violence but in this case it symbolizes life, fertility and womanhood.

Girls and women need to feel that they are not alone and that what is happening to their bodies is normal.

Womanhood is something to be proud of.

We believe that there should be universal understanding about menstruation. We therefore encourage that wherever possible include boys and men in discussion where appropriate.

It is important when teaching a group to discuss current ideas surrounding this taboo subject.

Most individuals will not have had any official teaching about this subject and leading such discussions can be difficult at first.

Create a safe environment in the class so students feel less embarrassed and therefore share their ideas.

Get everybody to introduce himself or herself, starting with you, as the leader of the class. Depending on the size of the group include where you are from and something you like or dislike.

Encourage participation with many questions to get information from the class. After each question write the answers received on the board. There may be some funny ideas surrounding menstruation and reproduction.

Try to respond positively to each contribution.

Allow your students to ask questions when they have them, not just at specific points.

If the class is large and mixed, encourage contribution by forming groups, provide pen and paper to write their answers and questions and nominate one spokes person per group.

It is important to identify where the confusion lies and re-assure and educate. Alter wording and embellish if needed, making sure everybody understands.

Use the local expressions such as: 'going to the moon'.

Do not ask direct and personal questions like; 'what methods do you use?' rather 'what are the methods you have seen people use?'



Body changes

Write the title body changes on the board. Explain that when a girl grows up there are changes in her appearance, some that we can see and others we cannot see.

Question: What body changes can be seen when a girl grows up?

External

- Breasts form
- Hair grows
- Hips grow bigger
- Pimples

Internal

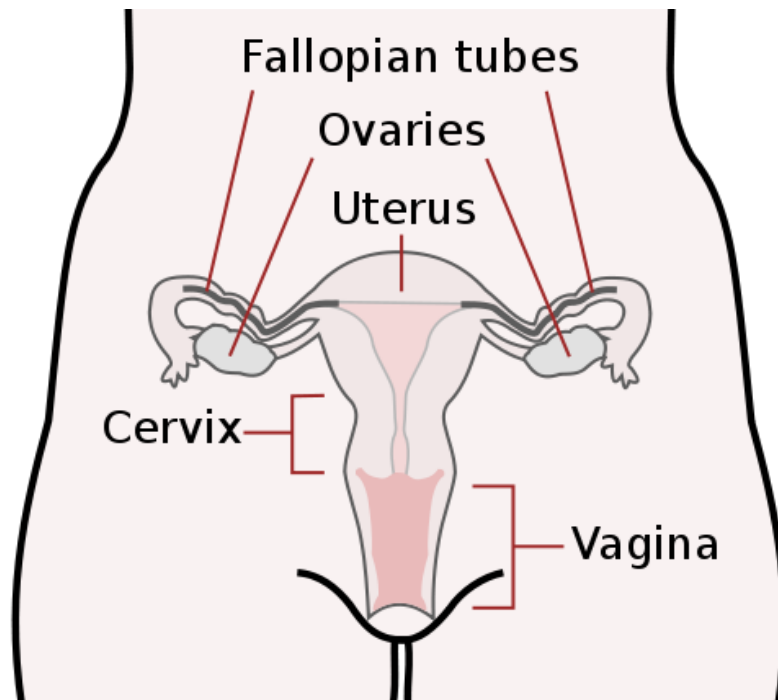
There are also other changes happening that cannot be seen.

Draw the reproductive system on the board and explain each part.

As a result of internal changes you can see menstruation.



The Female Reproductive System



Uterus or Womb - A pear-shaped organ that produces secretions and hosts the developing fetus. Its main function is to hold a fertilized egg (ovum), which sits amongst the blood in the walls of the uterus. This blood is formed specifically for this purpose to make a comfortable bed for the egg. If this egg is fertilized it becomes an embryo and then a baby. If the egg is not fertilized then the egg and blood are flushed away- this is menstruation.

Ovaries - There are two small organs that produce the egg cells that are very small and cannot be seen with our eyes. When an egg is released we call it ovulation.

Fallopian tubes - Are two tubes leading from the ovaries to the uterus. This is the passage for which the egg can pass down to the uterus for fertilization. This can take hours or even days.

Cervix - A very narrow passage that connects the vagina to the uterus.

Vagina - A soft muscular tube at the exterior of the body that leads to the cervix. There is often pubic hair surrounding the vagina that protects the vagina from infection and is a sign of sexual maturity.



Frequently asked Questions

Why do I have cramps?

Cramps are normal. This is caused by contraction of the muscles that surround the uterus. This cramping is helping the body expel the blood. If you are experiencing these cramps fill a large plastic bottle with warm water and hold against the skin. This is comforting and helps ease the pain.

Can you get pregnant during your period?

It is less likely but it is not impossible. Always use protection during sexual intercourse.

Are clots normal?

Yes. When blood pools it is likely to form more solid clumps. As a general rule, the redder the blood is, the faster it has reached the outside. The blacker it is, the longer it took to exit the body. If the blood is accumulating faster than the body's ability to transfer it out of the uterus, clots are the result. There are often little fragments of tissue and cells that increase clotting.

Do blood vessels burst for menstruation?

No. The blood seen is the shedding of the lining of the uterus. We call it the endometrium.

How much blood do we lose?

The blood is not coming straight from your veins. The blood is built up over the month. The average amount of blood is 35ml. This would fill a chicken egg. Between 10-80ml is considered normal. It often looks like you produce more blood than this. Hormonal disturbance, uterus problems or cancer can cause bleeding that is much heavier than this.

How long is a normal period?

The typical woman bleeds for two to seven days at the beginning of each menstrual cycle. It is normal for young girls or older women to not have very regular cycles. If abnormal cycles are coupled with infertility go see your doctor.

I have noticed menstruation changes during and after pregnancy, why?

During pregnancy and for some time after childbirth, menstruation is normally suspended; this state is known as amenorrhoea, i.e. absence of the menstrual cycle.



Frequently asked Questions cont.

What are twins?

Twins can be identical when one fertilized egg splits. They can also be non-identical. This is when two different eggs are fertilized during the same pregnancy.

What is menopause?

Menopause is the name given to the last menstrual period. It is the cycle in a woman's life when her ovaries stop producing eggs, when her periods stop and when her hormone levels change. Menopause is something that typically happens between the ages of 47 and 53. The start of menopause means hot flushes, no more periods (with occasional bleeds), and the end to a woman's reproductive years.

Please note all new questions during the training. The FAQ page can be added to. If you do not know the answer to a question, be honest and tell them you will try and find out and let them know.



Menstruation

Question: What do you think Menstruation is?

Listen to all ideas and note them down.

Explain that monthly bleeding is normal and is not a disease. It happens to all girls when they are entering womanhood. Use the diagram of the reproductive system above to help describe menstrual blood forming inside the uterus and the egg being released from the ovaries down the fallopian tube to the uterus. The blood forms a layer to create a comfortable environment for a baby to grow if the egg is fertilized. However, when you are young, and the egg is not fertilized, this blood is not needed and it is released.

This is not blood straight from your veins and it has been stored up over time but now wants to come out.

Things to expect at the time of the month

Ask the students what they have noticed?

- Stomach pains
- Sore breasts
- Pimples
- Emotional
- Hungry
- More smelly
- Increased or decreased libido

Question: Are there any other symptoms?



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Menstruation Game

Get volunteers to be part of the reproductive system and act out what happens during menstruation.

This will make sure the whole process understood and remembered and also help to make them laugh and relax.

- 2 people, 1 to be each ovary,*
- 6 people, 3 for each fallopian tube,*
- 2-3 people holding hands to be the uterus,*
- 1 person to be an egg,*
- 5-6 to be the menstrual blood.*

Once the volunteers are standing to form the reproductive system add one by one the individuals posing as menstrual blood. When all the volunteers are inside the arms of the uterus ask the person who is acting as the egg to pass down the fallopian tube to the uterus. When all the volunteers are squeezed in between the arms of the uterus, wanting to be released, make the point that it is unhealthy the keep the blood trapped in the uterus, it needs to be released.



Managing Menstruation

In groups, girls can brainstorm answers to the questions about managing menstruation and feedback to the group.

Question: Write down ways you or ways you have seen people manage their menses.

Question: What problems have you seen or heard of that comes from using the local methods?

Question: What do you think happens if the blood can't come out?

Reproduction

Take the opportunity to warn the girls of two things:

1. If you have started to have monthly bleeding and you have unprotected sex, this egg can be fertilized and you can become pregnant.

2. Unprotected sex can also cause other problems such as sexual transmitted diseases.

Symptoms include redness, itching, spots, increased secretions, and bad smell. Some of these sexually transmitted diseases if untreated can cause infertility in the future.

There is another way...



Washing and Maintenance

Re-usable cloth pads can last up to 2 years if they are cared for in the right way. When teaching this section to a group it is advised to demonstrate washing and get girls to participate as much as possible.

Underline the importance of hygiene at this point and link back to what has been discussed during the menstruation and puberty section.

Girls are learning how to make the pads. Therefore, will be able to easily maintain and replace pads when they become worn or too stained. It is very cheap to replace the inserted cloth it is also not embarrassing to hang it outside as nobody would know it was sanitary wear.

Practical Teaching Kit

- Female panty
- Any coloured liquid (roselle tea)
- Soap/detergent
- 1 pad
- 2 small basins
- Apron
- Hand towel

Place the sanitary towel on the panty and use the ink to soil the pad.

Demonstrate the washing of the separated pieces washing it thoroughly and getting people to help you.

Do not use wet pads

Do not share pads with other girls

Do not reuse a soiled pad

Do not iron the pads as you may melt the plastic.

Do not use fabric softener, as it will make them less absorbent.



Washing Instructions

1. Remove the inner pad from the outer pad. Rinse the used pad under running water or in a bucket of water. It is easier to wash out blood whilst it is still wet. Use cold water. Add lemon juice or a spoonful of vinegar if possible to help remove stains. Do not use warm water as it causes clotting and staining.
2. Leave the pad to soak until there is time to wash the pad properly.
3. Drain the bloody water into the toilet or use to water your plants because they like all the extra vitamins and minerals.
4. Wash by hand by running cold water over them to remove the remaining blood. Add a little soap and cold water. Scrub the pads just like any clothes until they are as clean as you can get them. It can take 10 minutes per pad for good results.
5. Rinse and squeeze the pads well. Hang outside for fast drying and cover with a thin sheet if it is embarrassing. Alternatively, hang them inside. They can drip dry.
6. Only use again when they are COMPLETELY dry! Slightly wet pads can encourage irritation and infection.



Instruction Manual: 'How to make your own Mwezi Sanitary towel'

Tools.

Sewing machine or needle and thread

Scissors

Card or paper for the template

Pen

Ruler

Dressmaking pins or paperclips

Materials.

Thin cotton: Individuals and small groups can use second hand shirts from the market and off-cuts at a local tailor. Larger bags of off-cuts can be bought for larger groups. These are the cheapest and most environmentally friendly sources. Patterned and dark coloured fabrics are generally preferred as they do not show stains as much as lighter colours.

Absorbent material: This can be a second hand thin towel or felling soft cotton used for a baby shawl. Both are available at local market.

Plastic non-leak layer: Polythene sheets are thin and strong sheets that are often used for mattress protectors during bed-wetting. This is the ideal material, as it does not make much noise when moved. However if it is unavailable or out of the price range alternatives include thin shower curtains or strong plastic bags that have been thoroughly cleaned.

Press studs or Velcro for fastening: Found in larger material shops or can be taken off old clothes. Press-studs come in a pack of 6 or 60 and Velcro can be bought in strips or reels.

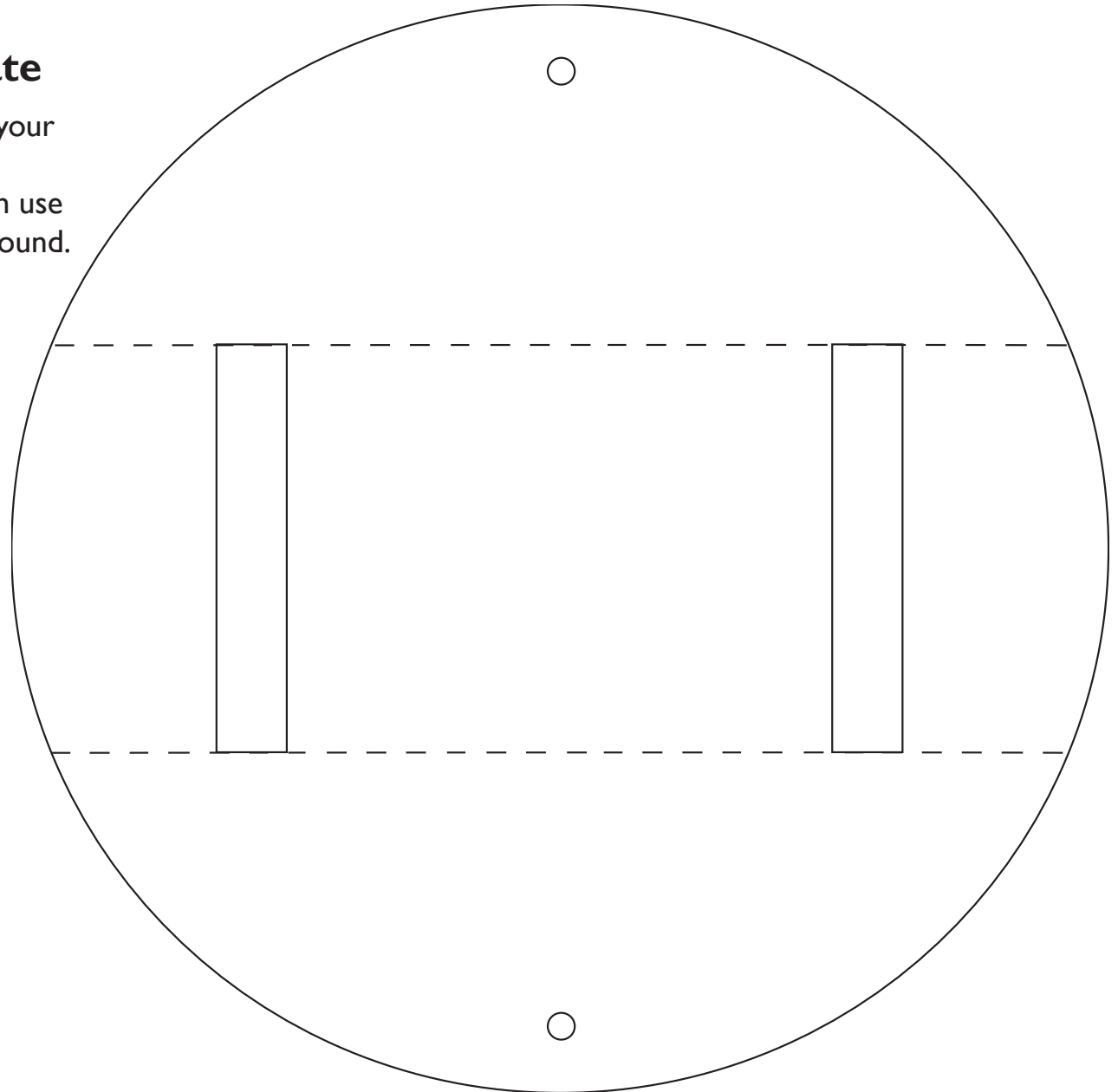


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step 1: make a template

Make a template out of card to your chosen diameter.

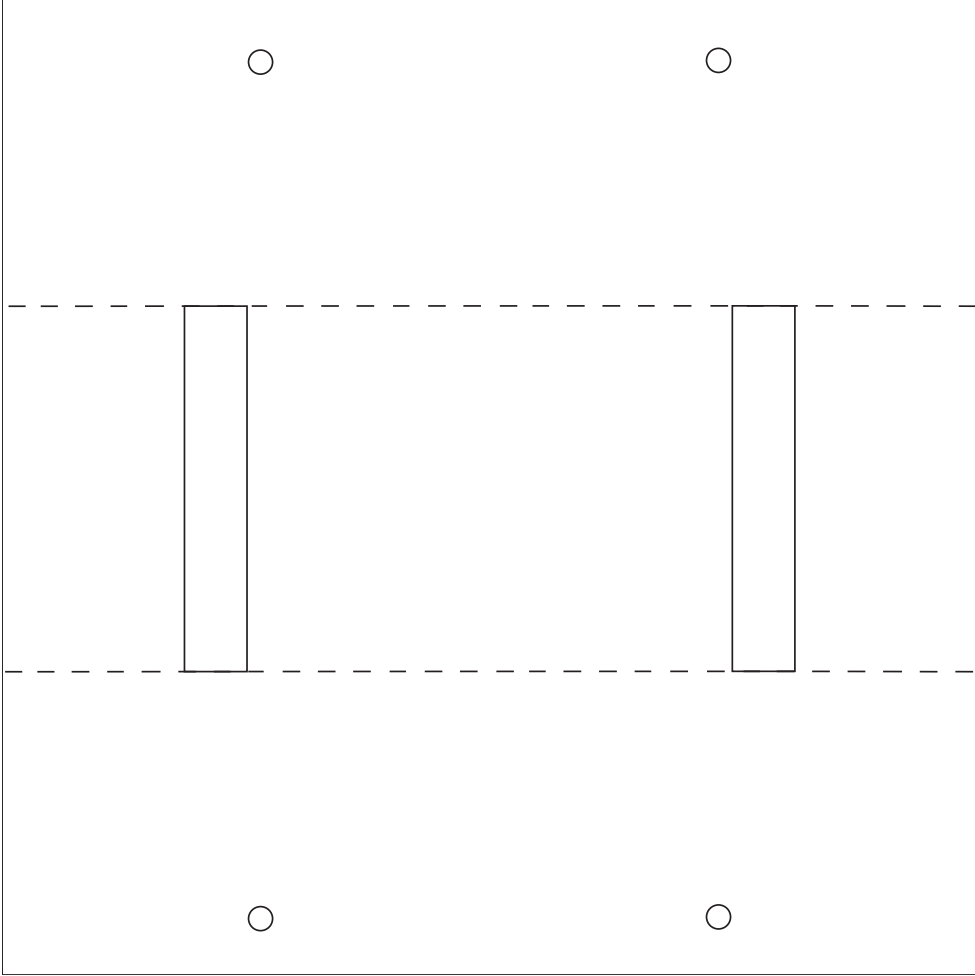
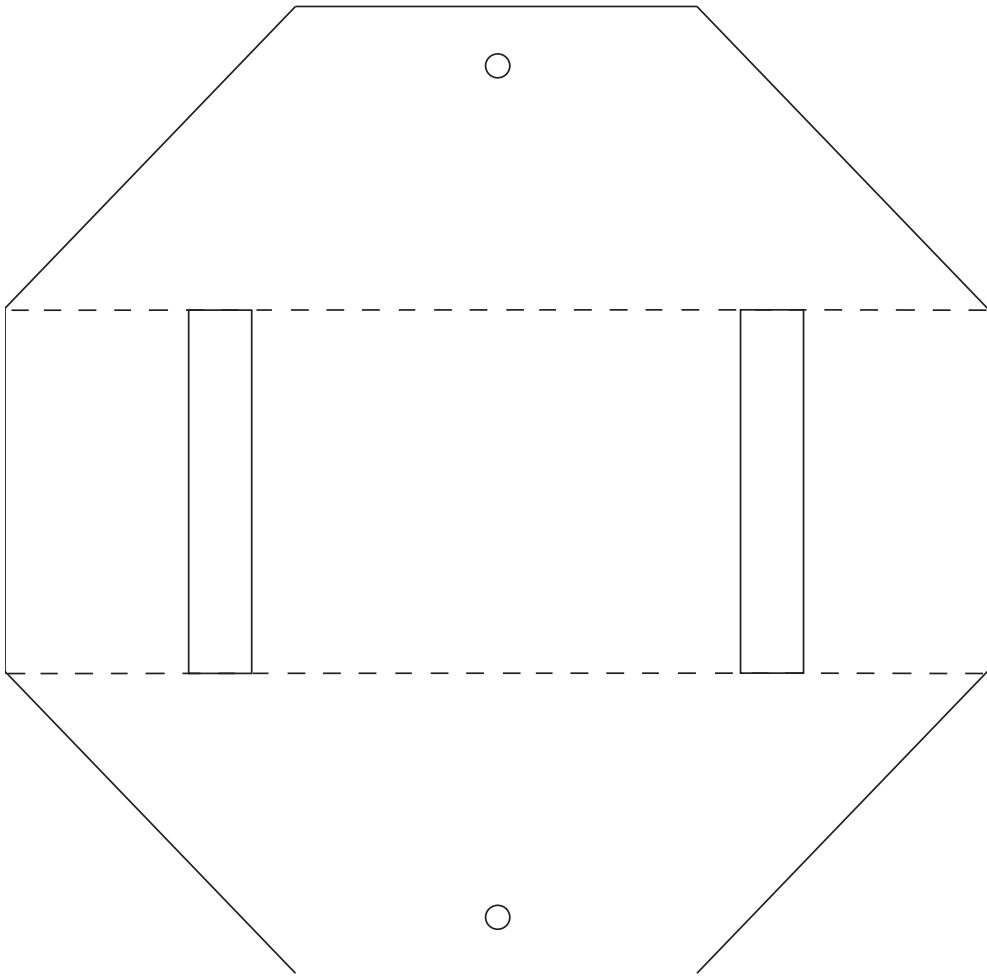
All sizes are only a guide. You can use a large plate or bowl to trace around.





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step 1: make a template
Alternative Designs



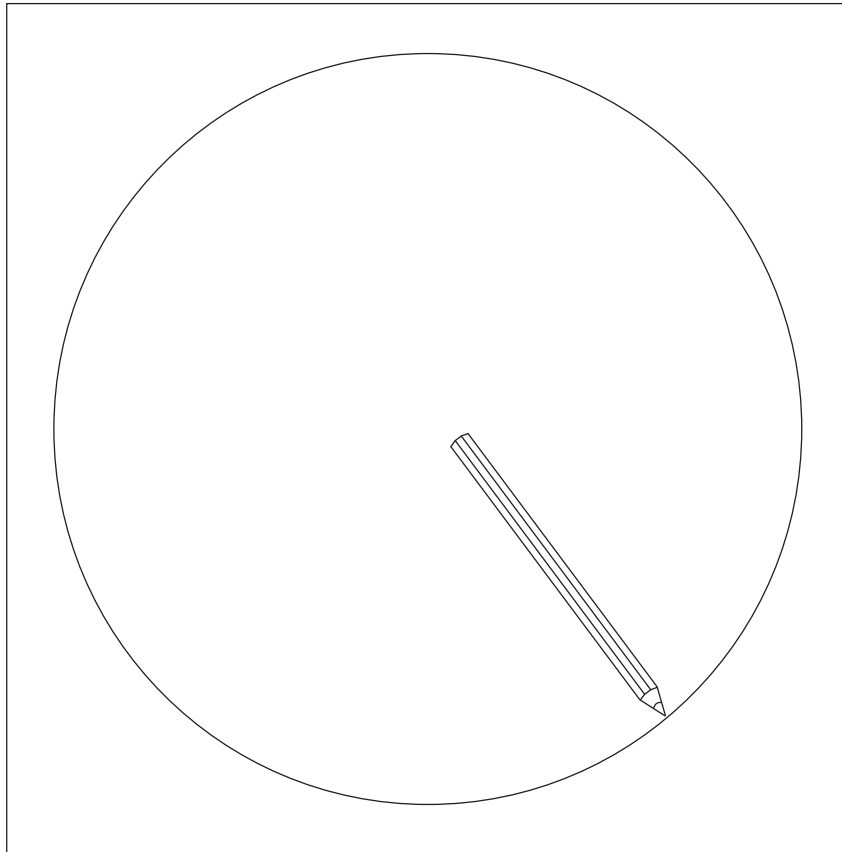


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step 2: trace

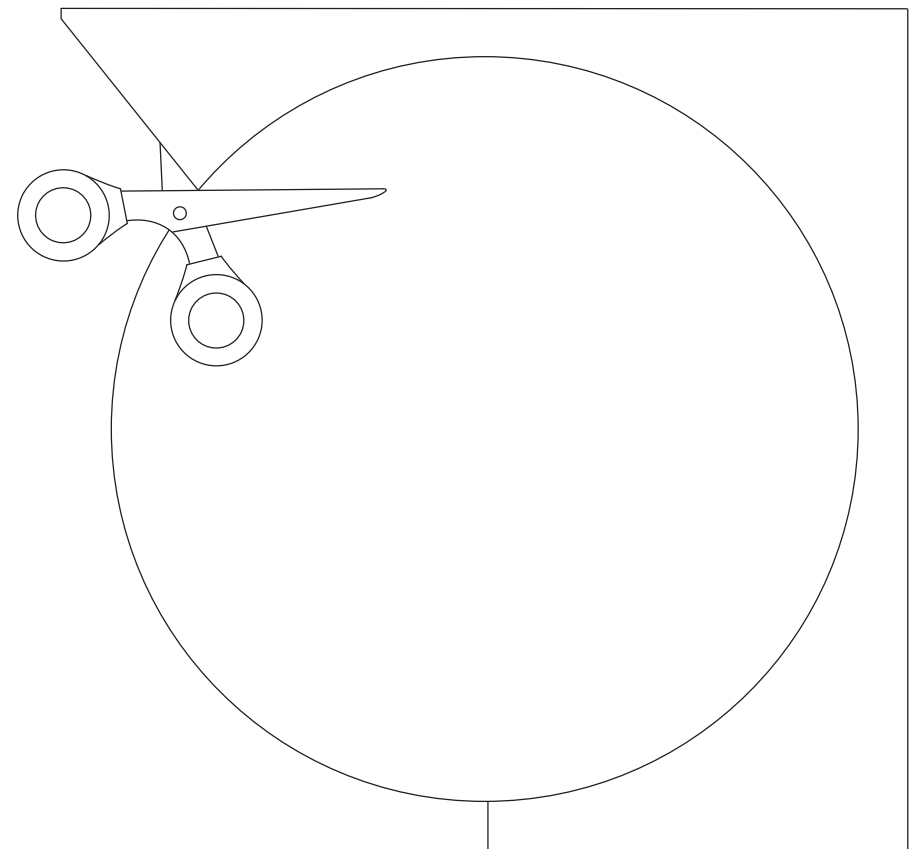
Place your template on your material ready to start making your sanitary towel

Use a pen or pencil to draw around the template or plate



step 3: cut

Cut the circular shapes from the cotton and plastic using scissors



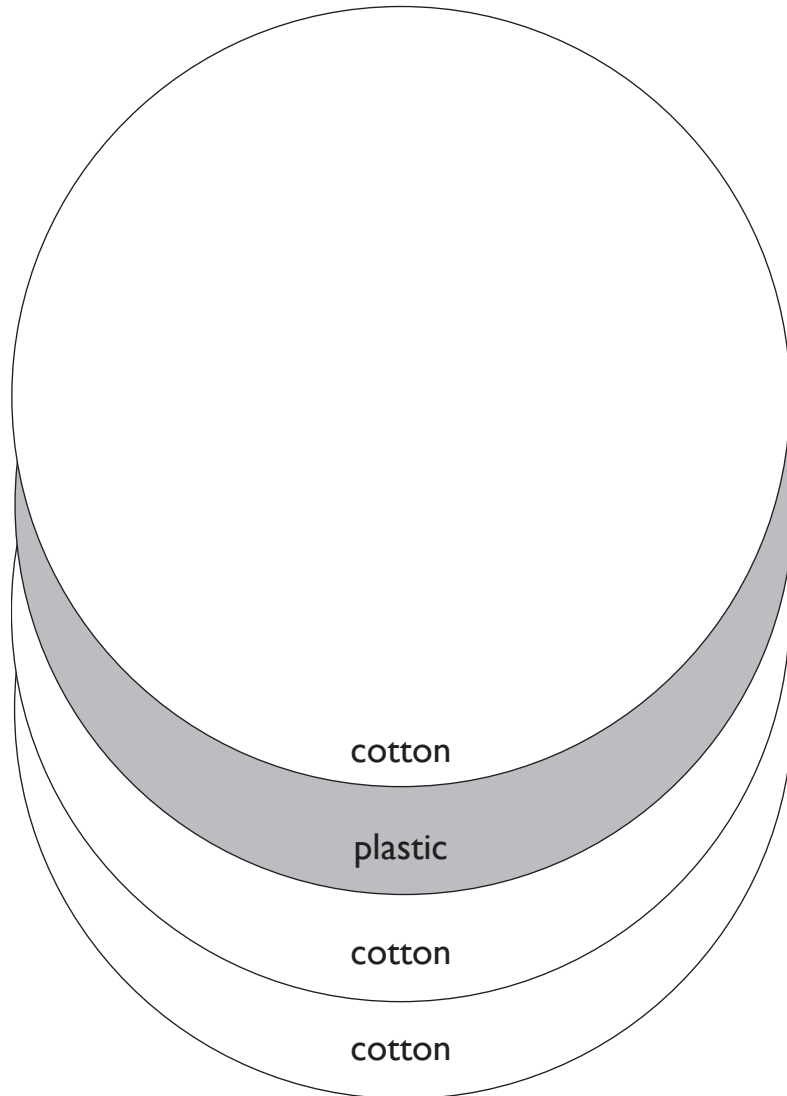
Draw **three** circles on the cotton and **one** on the plastic



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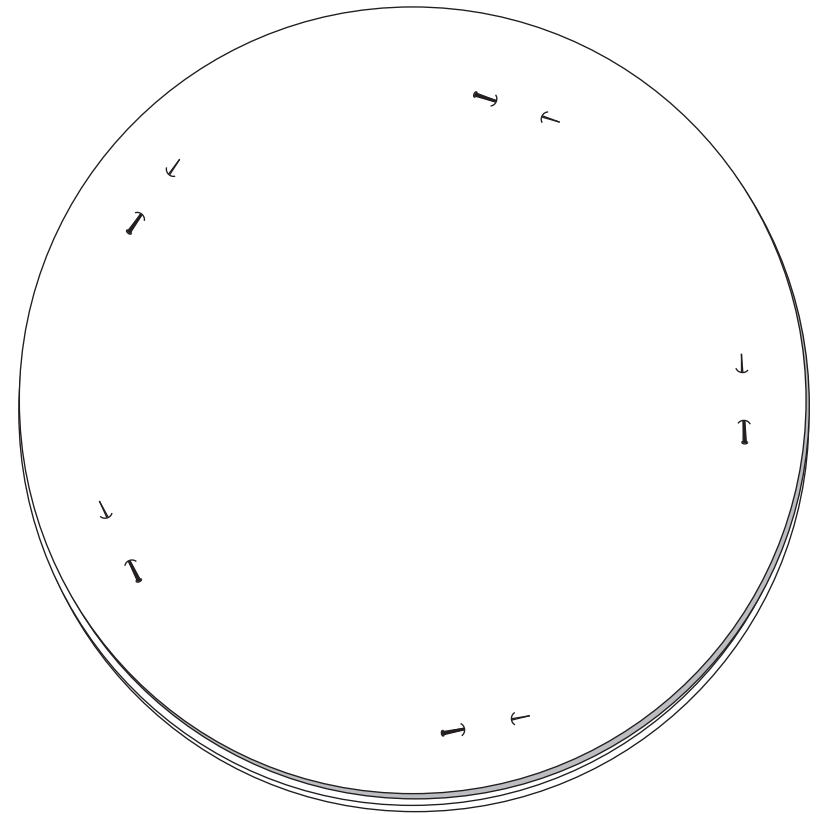
step 4: put in order

Place the circular cut-outs in the correct order as shown



step 5: pin into place

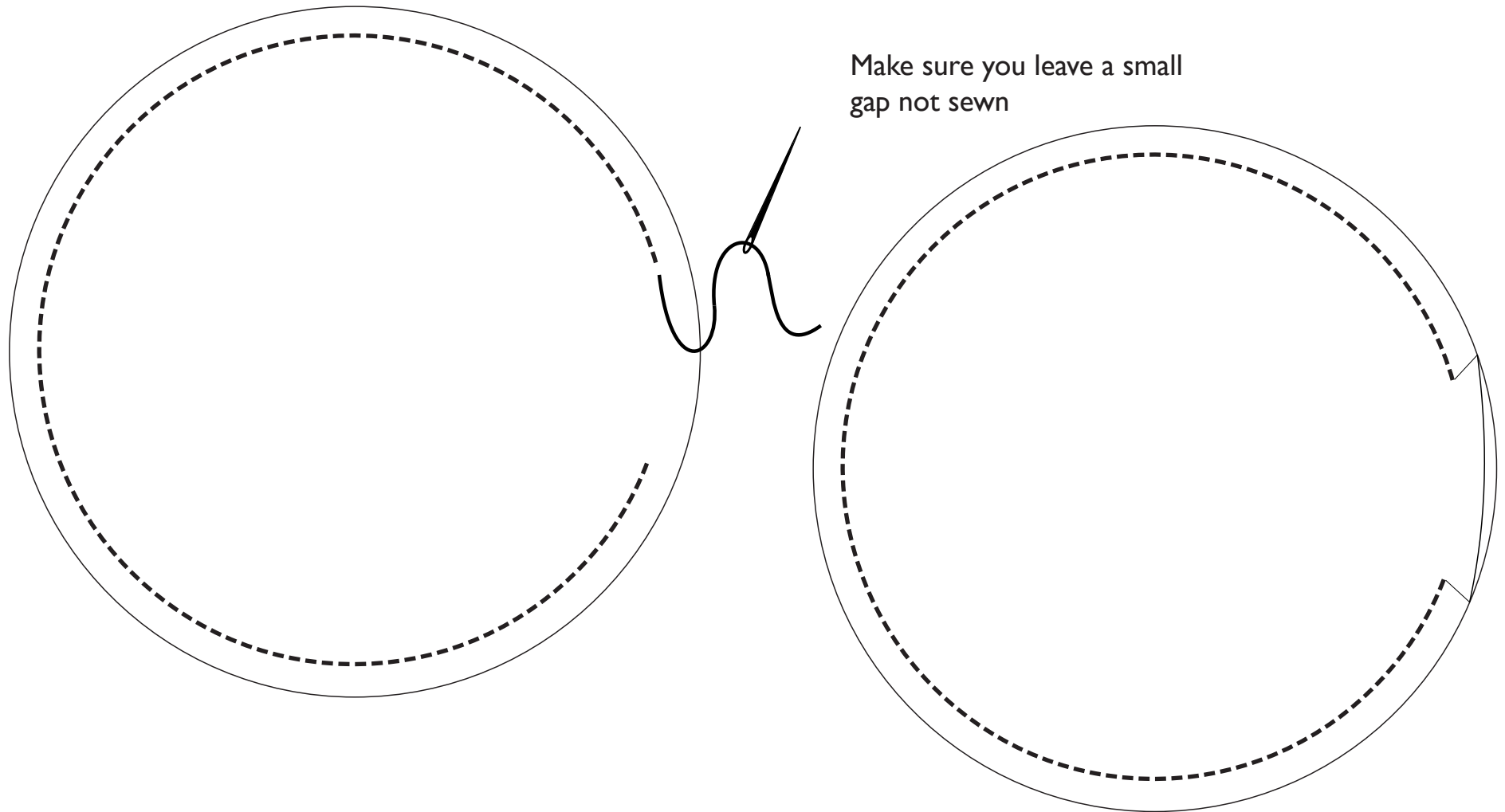
This is optional as dress-making pins are not always available. Paper clips could also be used.





step 6: sewing the pad

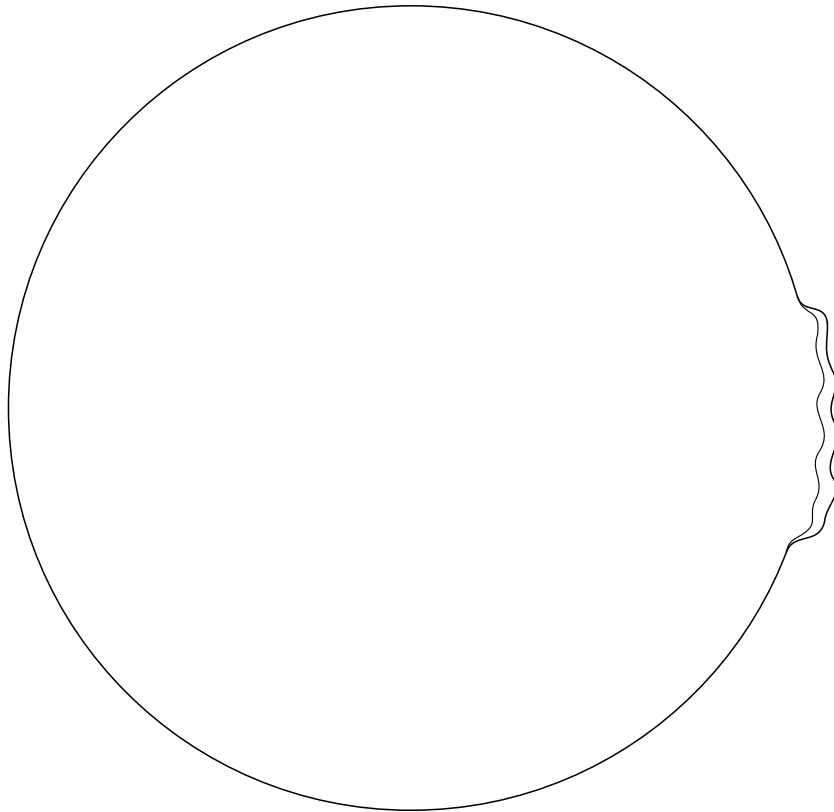
Hand sew around the edge using a straight stitch. You can use a sewing machine if available





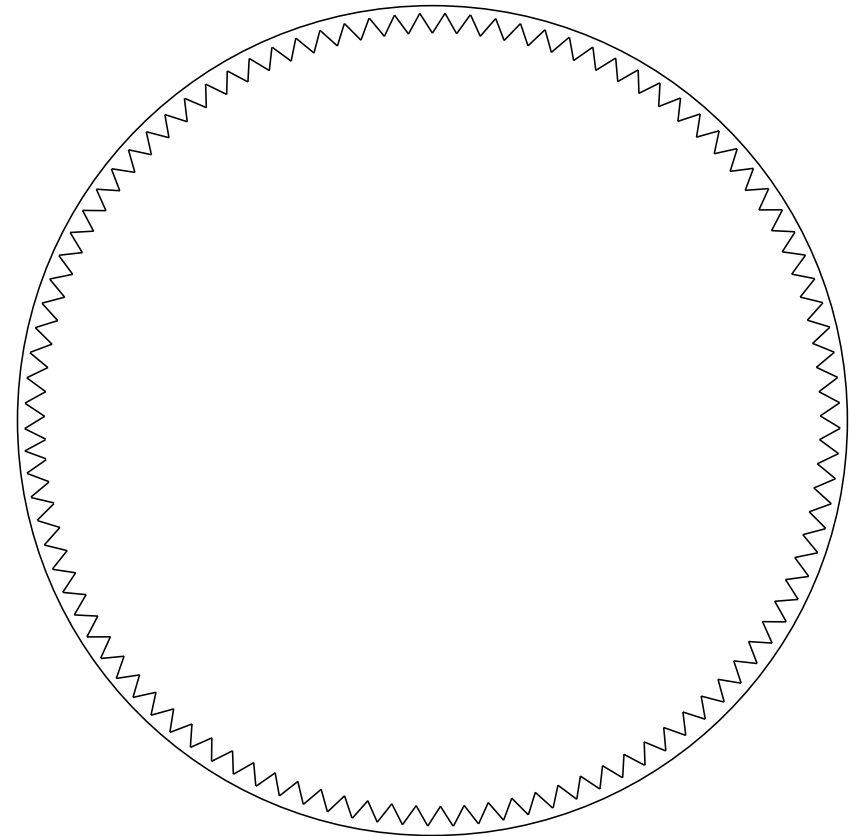
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step 7: turn inside out



step 8: sew around the edge

Use Zig-zag stitch around the edge to seal up the hole. Zig-zag stitch is good because it is strong.





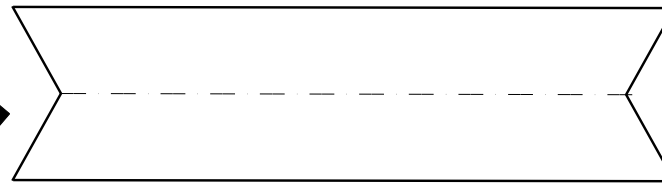
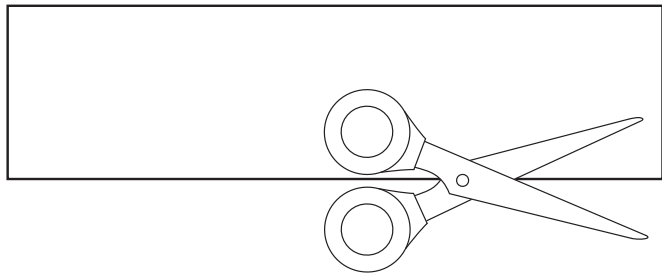
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step 9: making the straps

Now make the straps that will hold the absorbant material in place.
Use the scrap cotton left over from makig the circular pad.

Cut

Cut a strip from the spare cotton 7-8 inches long and 2 inches wide



Fold

Fold the strip in half along the length



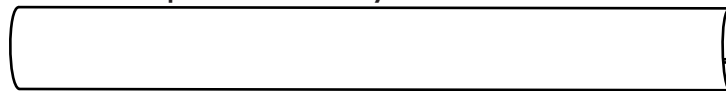
Sew

Sew a line of straight stitch to make a tube 0.5-0.75 inches wide



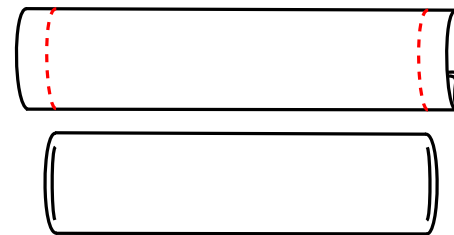
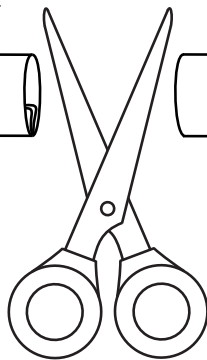
Turn inside out

Turn inside out. Use a pen or a safety pin to help



Cut

Fold the tude in half length ways to find the middle.
Cut using scissiors leaving you with two lengths of tube 3-4 inched long.



Tuck

It is optional here to tuck in the rough/frayed edges. This is just to make it look neat.



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step 10: add the fastenings

When adding the fastenings, make sure that you sew the velcro or press studs the right way round so that they can bind together. When you have marked out the position, put the pad in a closed position to make sure you are sewing them on the right side.

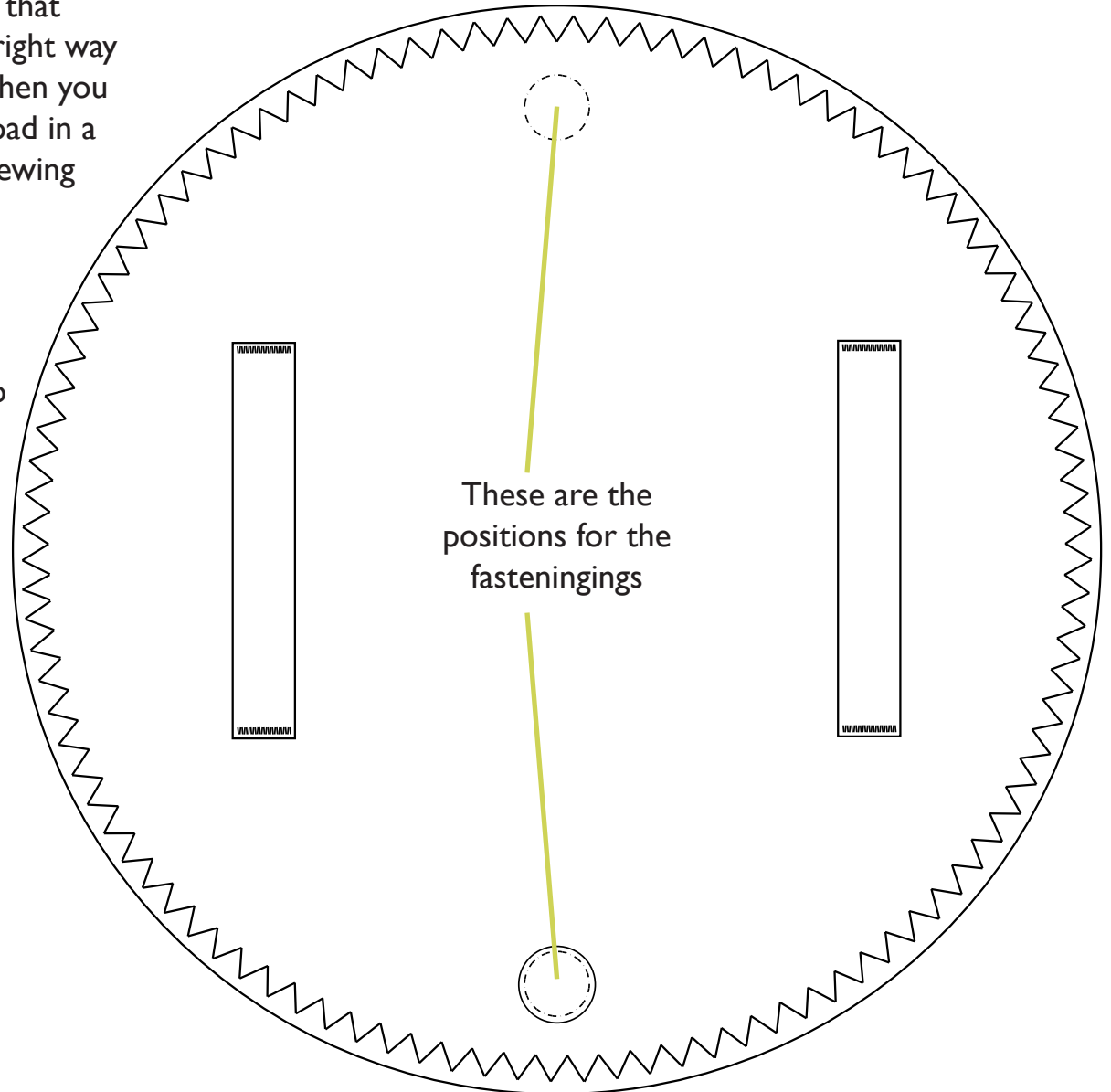
Velcro

Velcro is a good option as it is easy to clean.

Make sure that you cut your pieces into circles otherwise the corners are very sharp

Press studs

Press studs are also very good and easy to attach. They are cheaper than velcro





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step 11: making the absorbant cloth inserts

Cut cotton felling, towel, or any other absorbant material of your choice into rectangular strips

Width

The width is the fixed size of the width of the pad diameter. If you are using the suggested dimensions the width is 8 inches.

Length

The length can be long or short depending on the flow of the individual. Long strips require additional folding into layers and are therefore suited to a heavier flow. Smaller pieces have reduced layers and will be suitable to a lighter flow. It is good if girls have a number of different lengths for different stages of their monthly period.

Do not use synthetics materials, nylon or plastic

Do not use very old or dirty material

Do use natural materials, towel, cotton and wool.

Measurement guide for the Strip length

10-13 layers - 40 inches

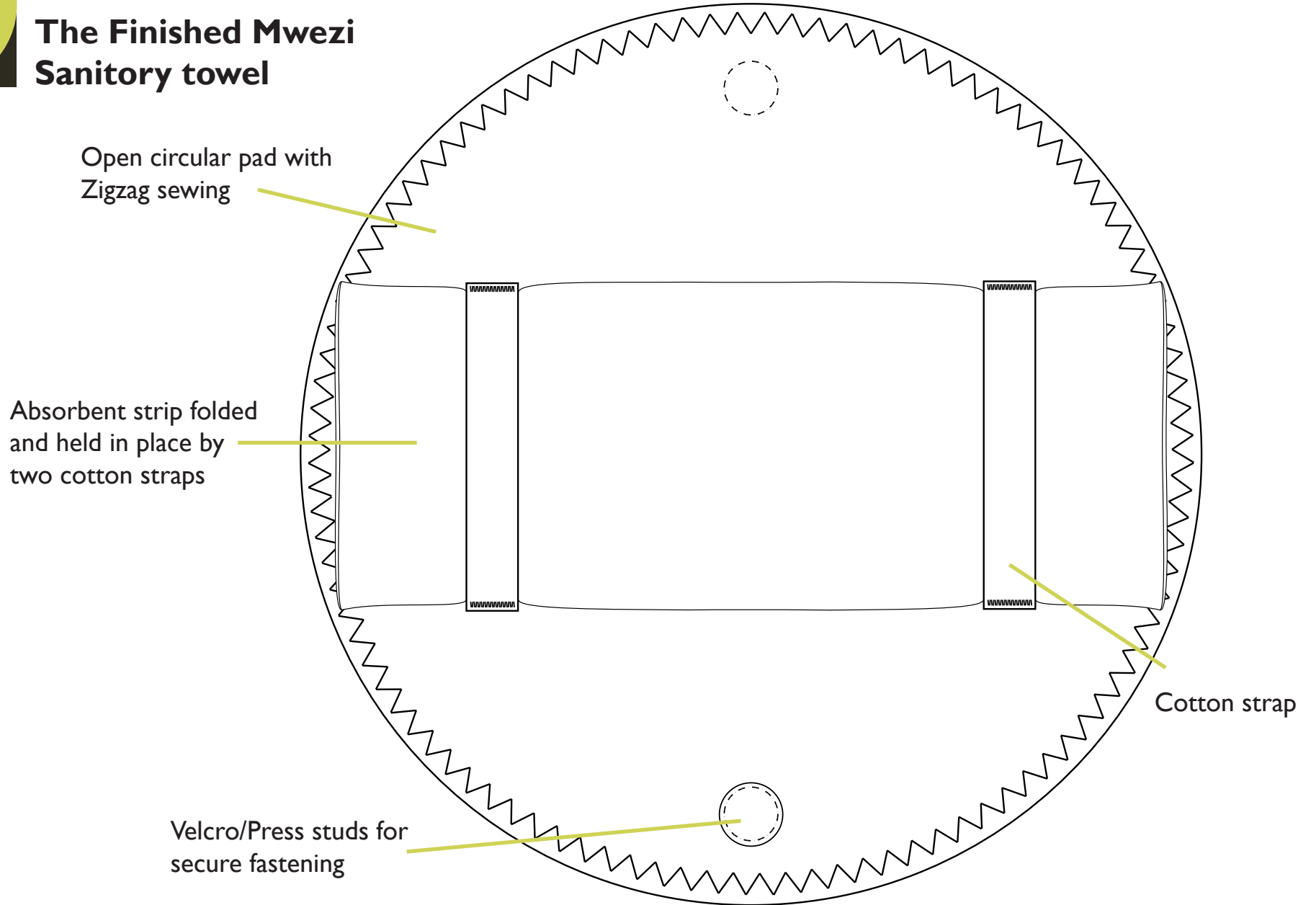
7-9 layers - 28 inches

4-6 layers - 16 inches



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The Finished Mwezi Sanitary towel

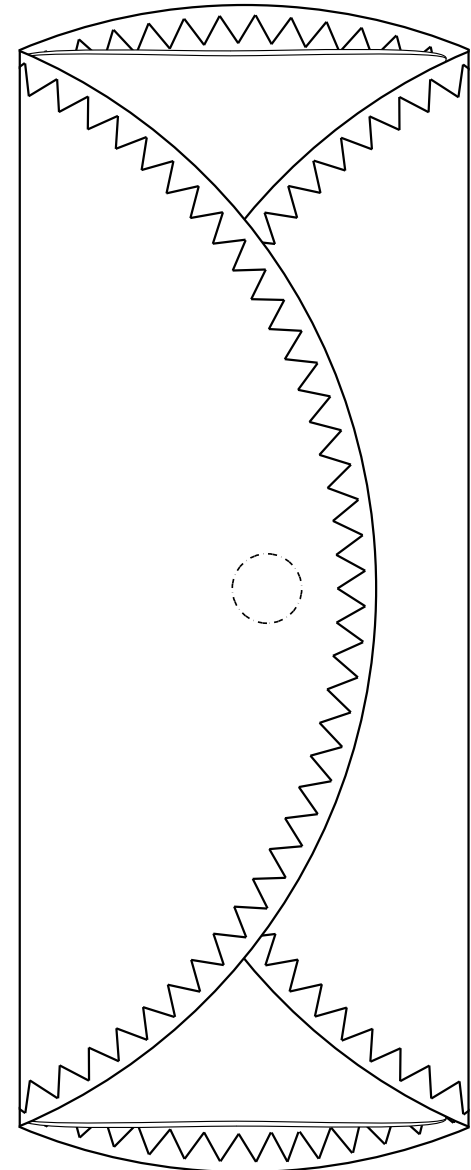
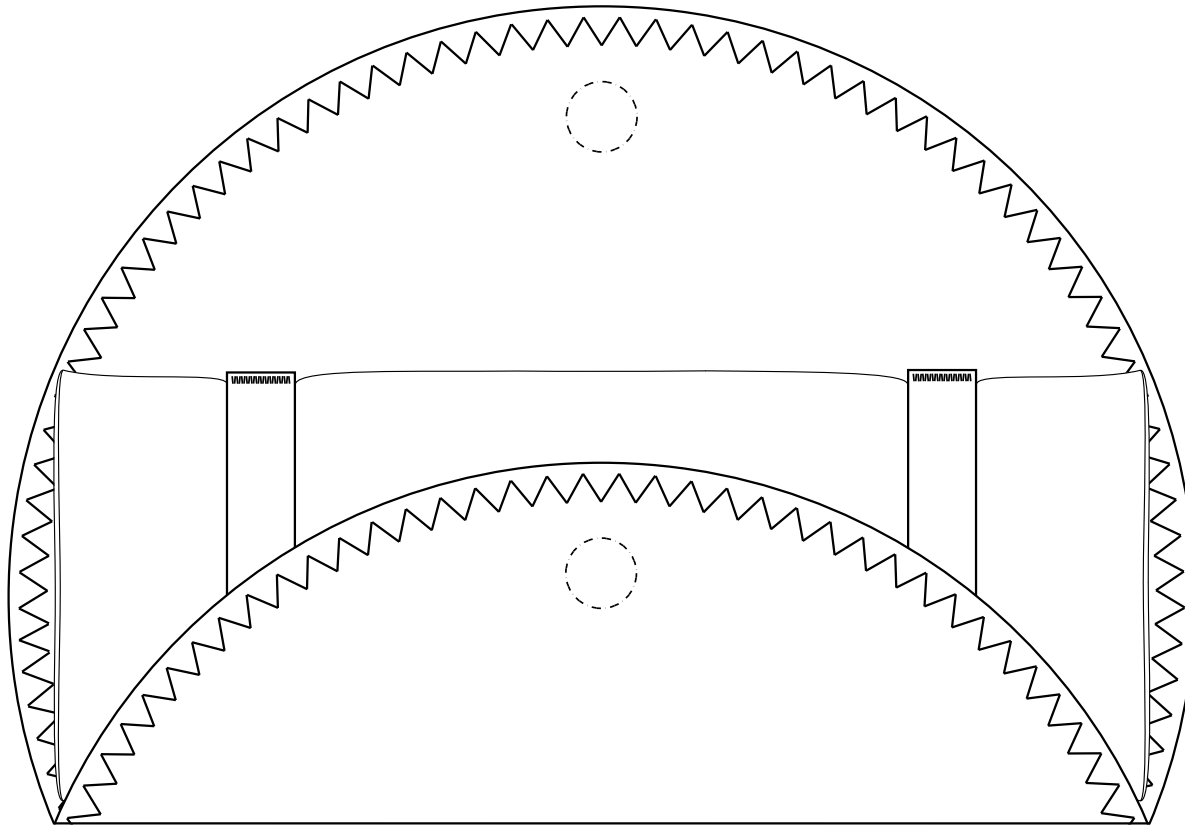




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**The Finished Mwezi
Sanitary towel**

In closed position for
transporting hygienically
when not in use





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Contact Information

Thank-you and welcome to this growing team of individuals around the world working together to free girls and women from the disruptions that menstruation brings to their lives.

Please take time to give us feedback and keep us informed about your work.

Susannah Henderson BSC (Hons)

Director and Founder of access-health Project Mwezi

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Access-health Project Mwezi is a community Based Organization (CBO) in Kisumu, Kenya. Legal Status: Community Based Organization under Kenya Social Services. Incorporation: October 18, 2010

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