



FACT SHEET

TOOL KIT FOR TEEN CARE, SECOND EDITION

MENSTRUAL PERIODS

What is a menstrual period?

- Vaginal bleeding that occurs in adolescent girls and women as a result of hormonal changes. It usually happens in a predictable pattern, once a month, and is a sign you are becoming a young woman.

What is a normal menstrual cycle?

- Menstrual periods can begin as early as age 8 years or as late as age 15 years, but most often begin around age 11–12 years. Other signs you may be getting ready to have your menstrual period are breast development and pubic hair development. Menstrual cycles usually begin approximately 2 years after these events.
- Menstrual periods usually occur every 28 days but commonly vary from 21 days to 35 days and last from 4 days to 7 days. Talk to a doctor if your menstrual periods last more than 7 days.
- It may take several years for menstrual periods to become regular. Irregular menstrual periods are common for up to 2 years after your menstrual cycles begin.
- In order to tell if your menstrual period is normal, a calendar can be made of the last 3 months, detailing every day that bleeding occurred. Counting from the first day of bleeding in one menstrual period to the first day of bleeding in the next menstrual period can help your doctor decide if your menstrual periods are normal. If the bleeding often occurs less than 21 days or more than 45 days apart, you should see your doctor.

What is an abnormal menstrual period?

- No menstrual periods by age 15 years
- No menstrual periods and no breast development by age 13 years
- Menstrual periods that occur less than every 21 days or that occur 45 or more days apart
- Menstrual periods that last for more than 7 days
- Bleeding that requires changing a pad or tampon every 30–60 minutes for 3–4 hours

- Bleeding between menstrual periods
- Missing a menstrual period after several regular menstrual periods
- Severe pain (see the “Menstrual Cramps and Dysmenorrhea” fact sheet for more information), with menstrual periods, that does not go away with ordinary pain medicine or pain that causes nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- If your menstrual period seems abnormal, even if its regular, you should still check with a health care provider.

What causes abnormal menstrual periods?

- Missed menstrual periods can be a sign of pregnancy if you are having sex.
- The most common reason for abnormal menstrual periods is failure of the ovary to release an egg on a regular basis. This can be caused by the following conditions:
 - Physical or emotional stress
 - Changes in weight
 - Illnesses or hormone problems
- Sexually transmitted diseases (STD) can cause abnormal periods.
- Heavy bleeding can be caused by a condition in which the blood cannot clot well or other medical disorders.

What will the doctor do for an abnormal menstrual period?

- The doctor will ask questions about your menstrual periods and when they occur.
- The doctor will need to know about any medical problems you may have.
- The doctor may perform a pelvic examination, but this may not always be necessary. If you are sexually active, the doctor may want to do a pelvic examination to check for infections. He or she also may perform a pregnancy test or blood test(s) or both.
- Heavy bleeding and painful menstrual periods may be controlled with medicines such as ibuprofen or hormonal contraceptive pills.
- If the bleeding causes a low blood count or anemia, iron pills may be needed.





For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Telephone: (202) 638-5577 or (800) 673-8444

Web: www.acog.org

AWARE Foundation

Telephone: (215) 955-9847

Web: www.awarefoundation.org

Center for Young Women's Health

Telephone: (617) 355-2994

Web: www.youngwomenshealth.org

Go Ask Alice

Telephone (212) 854-5453

Web: www.goaskalice.columbia.edu

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada

Telephone: (800) 561-2416 or (613) 730-4192

Web: http://sogc.medical.org/index_e.asp

www.sexualityandu.ca/home_e.aspx

TeensHealth

Nemours Foundation

Telephone: (904) 232-4100

Coping with common period problems:

Web: www.teenhealth.org/teen/sexual_health/girls/menstrual_problems.html