



Pharmaceutical
Society of Australia



Period Problems

Women can have a variety of problems with their menstrual periods. Some of the more common problems are premenstrual syndrome (PMS), painful periods (dysmenorrhoea), very heavy periods (menorrhagia) and no periods (amenorrhoea). Lifestyle changes and medicines may help period problems.

Premenstrual syndrome

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) or premenstrual tension (PMT) refers to a range of physical and emotional symptoms that some women experience in the one to two weeks before menstruation.

PMS is most likely due to changes in hormones and brain chemicals that occur during the menstrual cycle, combined with life's tensions.

Physical symptoms include:

- Fluid retention (e.g., bloated abdomen, swollen fingers and ankles)
- Food cravings
- Tender, swollen breasts
- Weight gain
- Aches and pains
- Headache
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Tiredness, no energy, difficulty sleeping
- Being clumsy or uncoordinated
- Skin problems (e.g., pimples, acne).

Emotional symptoms include:

- Feeling irritable or angry
- Feeling sensitive
- Feeling sad, depressed, hopeless
- Anxiety
- Lower coping ability
- Lower libido
- Poor concentration
- Less interest in work and social life
- Wanting to be alone.

The timing of symptoms will indicate whether or not they are due to PMS. PMS symptoms only occur after ovulation (mid-cycle) and disappear when menstruation starts. Marking symptoms on a calendar or keeping a daily menstrual chart over two to three months can help with the diagnosis.

Period pain (Dysmenorrhoea)

Period pain is thought to be caused by increased levels of body chemicals called prostaglandins. Prostaglandins affect uterine muscles and may also affect stomach and bowel muscles.

Most women have some pain with their periods. Symptoms usually begin the day before the period and gradually ease after the bleeding starts.

Symptoms include:

- Cramping or aching pain across the lower abdomen. The pain may spread to the lower back and legs
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea
- Headache
- Lightheadedness.

Some women find that periods are no longer painful after pregnancy and childbirth or while using hormonal contraceptives.

Menorrhagia

Heavy bleeding can be caused by many things including hormonal imbalance, endometriosis, polyps, fibroids and IUDs. It is difficult to know how much bleeding is too much, but if it interferes with everyday life there may be a problem. Sometimes a woman will bleed so heavily that she eventually becomes anaemic. Treatment depends on the cause of the heavy bleeding. A doctor can help find the cause of heavy bleeding.

Amenorrhoea

Periods stop during pregnancy, while breastfeeding and after menopause, but they may also stop, or be irregular, for other reasons including low body weight, excessive exercise, stress, travel and polycystic ovary syndrome. A doctor can help find the reason why periods have stopped or are irregular.

Note: If a young woman has not had a period by 16 years of age it is important that she check with a doctor.

Medicines

A variety of medicines can help with period problems. Ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice.

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g., ibuprofen, naproxen, mefenamic acid, aspirin) block prostaglandin formation and can help relieve period pain. Other pain relievers (e.g., paracetamol, codeine) may not be as effective.
- Hormone therapy (e.g., oral contraceptive pill) may help relieve PMS, period pain and menorrhagia.
- Certain complementary medicines (e.g., calcium supplements, pyridoxine) may help relieve symptoms of PMS.
- Certain antidepressants may help relieve emotional symptoms of PMS.

Note: Aspirin should not be used by girls under 16 years of age, unless advised by a doctor.

Self care

- Eat regular, healthy meals, including plenty of fruit, vegetables and grain foods. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Exercise at a moderate level for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week – exercise can help reduce pain and promote a feeling of wellbeing.
- Do pelvic floor exercises daily.
- Get plenty of rest and sleep.
- Limit caffeine drinks (e.g., coffee, tea, cola, energy drinks). Caffeine can worsen some symptoms of PMS.
- Limit alcohol intake.
- Don't smoke.
- Wear a well fitting bra with supportive straps.
- Use relaxation techniques to help cope with tension and pain.
- Don't take your aggression out on family, friends or co-workers. Discuss your symptoms with them so they can understand how you're feeling.
- Spend time doing something you enjoy.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

Important

Period pain and problems may be caused by an underlying disease such as fibroids, endometriosis or pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). This is called 'secondary' dysmenorrhoea and is most common in women over 30 years. Pain may occur any time during the menstrual cycle, and can be relieved or worsened by menstruation. Consult a doctor if you have:

- Period pain for the first time over the age of 25
- Pain which is severe or prolonged
- Abnormal vaginal discharge
- Irregular or heavy bleeding
- Pain during sexual intercourse
- A fever with the pain.

To help ease period pain

- Massage the lower back and buttocks.
- Place a hot water bottle on your stomach or lower back.
- Lie flat on your back and put a pillow under your knees or lie on your side and bring your knees up to your chest.

Related fact cards

- *Anxiety*
- *Complementary Medicines*
- *Contraception*
- *Depression*
- *Menopause*
- *Menstrual Chart (ask your pharmacist – website only)*
- *Oral Contraceptives*
- *Pain Relievers*
- *Pelvic Floor Exercises*
- *Relaxation Techniques*
- *Sleeping Problems*

For more information

The Jean Hailes Foundation – website

www.jeanhailes.org.au

HEALTHInsite – website www.healthinsite.gov.au

Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia – website

www.shfpa.org.au

Understanding You – website

www.understandingyou.com.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

Sponsored by

NUROFEN
Period Pain



Made by



Always read the label. Use only as directed. Incorrect use could be harmful. If symptoms persist see your healthcare professional