

tool kit for teen care

Problems with 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.

What is a normal menstrual cycle?

- Periods usually begin around age 12 years, but can occur normally as early as age 9 years or as late as age 16 years.
- Periods usually occur every 28 days, but may commonly vary from 22 to 36 days, and last 4 to 7 days. If a period lasts more than 7 days, a doctor should be seen.
- It may take several years for periods to become regular.
- In order to tell if a teen's 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 period to the first day of bleeding in the next period can help tell if the teen's periods are normal. If the bleeding occurs consistently less than 21 days or more than 45 days apart, a doctor should be seen.

What is an abnormal period?

- No periods by age 16 years.
- No periods by age 13 years if there also is no sign of breast development.
- Periods that occur more often than every 21 days or that occur 45 or more days apart.
- 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 periods.
- Missing a period after several regular periods.

- Severe pain with periods that does not go away with ordinary pain medicine or that causes nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.
- Teens with any of the above symptoms should see a doctor.
- If a teen's period is abnormal, but not irregular, she also should see a doctor.

What causes abnormal periods?

- Missed periods can be a sign of pregnancy in a teen who has had sex.
- The most common reason for abnormal periods is failure of the ovary to make an egg on a regular basis.
- Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) can cause abnormal periods.
- Heavy bleeding can be due to a condition in which the blood can't clot well or other medical disorders.

What will the doctor do for an abnormal period?

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



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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 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
409 12th Street SW
PO Box 96920
Washington, DC 20090-6290
Telephone: (202) 863-2497
Fax: (202) 484-3917
www.acog.org

AWARE Foundation
1015 Chestnut Street, Suite 1225
Philadelphia, PA 19107-4302
Telephone: (215) 955-9847
www.awarefoundation.org

The Center for Young Women's Health
300 Longwood Avenue, Box 310
Boston, MA 02115
Telephone: (617) 355-CYWH (2994)
Fax: (617) 232-3136
www.youngwomenshealth.org

Go Ask Alice
Columbia University Health Service
www.goaskalice.columbia.edu

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada
www.sexualityandu.ca

Tampax
www.beinggirl.com