



PERIOD PROBLEMS

Many women have a collection of symptoms, both physical and emotional, associated with their period. **Premenstrual Syndrome** (PMS or PMT – premenstrual tension) may be felt for up to two weeks before a period starts.

Period pain and cramps may be felt during the day before bleeding starts. Understanding the changes happening in your body will help you deal with and control some of these symptoms.

PREMENSTRUAL SYNDROME

Premenstrual syndrome is most likely caused by the changes in hormone levels that occur during a woman's menstrual cycle.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Physical

- fluid retention – bloated abdomen, increase in weight, swelling of ankles and fingers
- increased thirst or appetite
- tender, swollen or painful breasts
- dull aches and pains
- headache
- constipation
- tiredness/no energy /difficulty sleeping
- skin breaks out

Emotional

- being irritable, aggressive, angry
- difficulty concentrating
- being clumsy or uncoordinated
- feeling of hopelessness, being 'depressed', down and sad
- decreased interest in work, friends, hobbies

You probably have PMS if you:

- get several symptoms at the same time each month - starting any time from 2-14 days before the start of your period
- feel better once your period begins
- tension/anxiety/sudden mood swings

PERIOD PAIN

Period pain (dysmenorrhoea) is thought to be caused by an increase in activity of body chemicals called prostaglandins. These

chemicals are made by the lining of the uterus (the endometrium) and are released when it breaks down at the time of the period (menstruation).

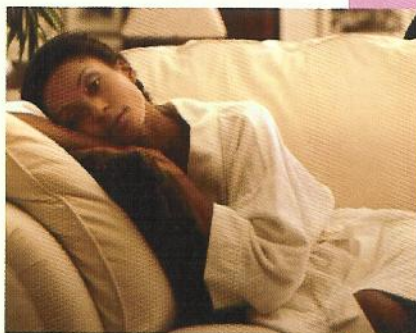
Prostaglandins make the muscles of the uterus contract, causing spasms and cramping pains. The blood also carries prostaglandins to the muscles of the stomach and bowel where they can cause nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea.

Primary dysmenorrhoea is the most common type of period pain. It usually occurs in women between the ages 17 and 25 years. Cramping pain in the lower abdomen usually begins the day before the period starts. The pain gradually eases after the bleeding starts.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- spasms, cramping or 'dragging' pain across the lower abdomen and/or lower back
- nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea
- stomach bloating
- headache
- occasional shakiness, dizziness

Women may stop getting period pain after pregnancy, or while taking the oral contraceptive pill.



IMPORTANT

Period pain can sometimes be caused by an underlying disease such as fibroids, endometriosis or pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). See your doctor if you have:

- period pain for the first time over the age of 25
- pain which starts a few days before your period and lasts throughout or longer than your menstrual flow
- an abnormal vaginal discharge
- abnormal bleeding
- pain during sexual intercourse
- pain with a late period
- a fever with the pain
- pain when passing a bowel motion

Secondary dysmenorrhoea is most common in women over 30 years. The pain may occur during other times of the menstrual cycle, and can be relieved or worsened by menstruation. The pain is often described as a dull, aching pain rather than spasms or cramps. If you experience this type of pain, see your doctor.

MEDICINES

- NSAID pain relievers (see Pain Relievers Fact Card) stop prostaglandins forming and help relieve period pain. Other pain relievers (e.g. paracetamol, codeine) may not be as effective
- hyoscine relaxes the muscles in the abdomen and can help reduce cramping pain and spasms. Ask your pharmacist
- your doctor can prescribe other medicines that may help stop period pain
- there are a variety of medicines used to treat symptoms of PMS. Ask your pharmacist or doctor

SELF CARE

- keep a record of your symptoms on a calendar (see *Menstrual Chart* Fact Card).
- get plenty of sleep (see *Sleeping Problems* Fact Card)
- wear a well-fitting cotton bra with supportive straps if you get sore breasts
- talk with friends who get period pain or PMS – share your experiences
- stop smoking (see *Smoking* Fact Cards)

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist



To help ease period pain:

- massage the lower back and buttocks
- 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
- place a hot water bottle on your stomach or lower back

Reduce stress

- use relaxation techniques to help cope with tension and pain (see *Relaxation Techniques* Fact Card)
- try not to take your aggression out on family and friends. Discuss your symptoms with them so they can understand how you're feeling
- have time to yourself - read a book, go for a walk, do some gardening

Physical activity

- regular exercise can help reduce pain and promote a feeling of well-being. Read the *Exercise & the Heart* Fact Card for suggestions
- do pelvic floor exercises daily (see *Pelvic Floor Exercises* Fact Card)

Healthy Eating

- eat healthy foods, including plenty of fruit and vegetables
- read the *Fat & Cholesterol* and *Weight & Health* Fact Cards for suggestions on how to eat low fat, nutritious food

Recommended reading:

LLEWELLYN-JONES, D
Everywoman
Penguin Books 1998

Other relevant Fact Cards:

- *Sleeping Problems*
- *Menstrual Chart*
- *Relaxation Techniques*
- *Pain Relievers*
- *Pelvic Floor Exercises*
- Nutrition cards
- Smoking cards

Contact:

Your doctor – listed under Medical Practitioners in the yellow pages of the phone book

Your local **Women's or Community Health Centre** – listed in the white pages of the phone book

Your Self Care pharmacist. To find: (02) 6283 4777

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

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

KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN

DAVID S. NOLTE PHARMACY 701 RATHDOWNE ST., NTH CARLTON • 9349 1522 • 3049L

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The information in this card was current at time of printing.*

