

Irregular Menses

It can take up to 5 years from a girl's first period for her body to develop a regular cycle. During that time, her body is essentially adjusting to the influx of hormones being produced by the ovaries. And what's "regular" varies from person to person. The typical cycle of an adult female is 28 days, but most teens and women's cycles vary from 22 days and to as long as 32 days. Changing hormone levels might make a girl's cycle shorter one month and longer the next. She can skip months, get a period every two weeks, or alternate between heavy and light bleeding from month to month. The following are some of the common menstrual irregularities.

Amenorrhea (Absence of Periods)

Girls who haven't started their periods by the time they are 15 – 16 years old or 2-3 years after they've shown the first signs of puberty have primary amenorrhea, which is usually caused by a hormone imbalance or developmental problem. The same factors can be responsible for secondary amenorrhea, which occurs when a girl who had normal periods suddenly stops menstruating for 4 to 6 months. Of course, pregnancy is the first possible cause to rule out when a girl skips periods. But many other factors can cause both primary and secondary amenorrhea and include:

- Stress
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Eating disorders (amenorrhea can be a sign that a teen is losing too much weight or purging)
- Excessive exercising
- Excessively low fat diets
- Thyroid conditions
- Other hormonal conditions/ genetic disorders
- Ovarian cysts

Menorrhagia (Extremely Heavy, Prolonged Periods)

It's normal for a girl's period to be heavier on some days than others. But menorrhagia usually leads to soaking through at least one pad or tampon an hour for several hours in a row or periods that last longer than 7 days. Girls with menorrhagia sometimes stay home from school or social functions because they're worried they won't be able to control the bleeding in public. The most frequent cause of menorrhagia is an imbalance between the levels of estrogen and progesterone in the body, which allows the lining of the uterus to keep building up. When the lining is finally shed during menstruation, the resulting bleeding is particularly heavy. Because many adolescents have slight hormone imbalances during puberty, menorrhagia isn't uncommon in teens. However, if the bleeding is excessive, they can become anemic, weak, dizzy, and tired. Therefore, even though this can happen, it needs to be investigated and possibly treated. Other causes for heavy menstrual bleeding include:

- Thyroid conditions
- Failure to ovulate
- Bleeding disorders
- Pregnancy
- Fibroids (benign growths) or polyps in the uterus (very rare in adolescents)

Treating Menstrual Problems

To determine whether a problem requires treatment, your daughter's gynecologist will do an exam (**NOT** a pelvic, depending on age), blood tests, and a pelvic ultrasound. These tests will reveal the diagnosis and then a decision can be made as to how to treat the condition. Hormone therapy may be necessary to control bleeding, treat or prevent anemia, and treat the cause.

It is important that you talk with your daughter about her periods so that she will know what to expect and what is normal or not normal. Don't hesitate to consult with a Pediatric/ Adolescent Gynecologist if you have concerns about that is going on. It is better to be told everything is okay than to delay until a severe problem exists.