

## Menstrual Periods

### What is a normal menstrual cycle?

- Menstrual periods can begin as early as age 8 years or as late as age 17 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.
- It may take several years for menstrual periods to become regular. Irregular menstrual periods are common for up to 2 - 6 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, this is not a normal cycle.

### 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 6-7 hours
- Bleeding between menstrual periods
- Missing a menstrual period after several regular menstrual periods
- Severe pain 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 your physician.

### 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 or eating habits
  - 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 problems.

### 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 pregnancy test and/or blood tests to check hormones and see how your blood clots.
- The doctor may perform a pelvic examination, but this may not always be necessary (especially if you are a teenager). If you are sexually active, the doctor may want to do a pelvic examination to check for infections.
- 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.