

Understanding Your Menstrual Cycle

Trevor A. Wing MBRCF FRCHM, MBACc, BSc, MSc, DMed

Overview

Women menstruate around 500 times in their lifetime and most women will menstruate every 4 weeks although some variation is normal. How much do you know about your menstrual cycle? Knowing when your menstrual cycle is normal means you will easily identify issues with your cycle and can seek help early. This following is designed to help you learn more about this wonder of nature.

Your Menstrual Cycle

Menstruation is your body's natural act of cleaning. Each month your body lines your uterus with a prolific layer of blood vessels, tissue and cells in preparation for a new life to start. Whilst this is happening in the first half of your cycle your ovaries start to ripen many eggs, selecting the best one for conception. If there is no sperm present within your fallopian tubes to fertilise that egg, then your uterus sheds the lining and the cycle starts again. This is commonly called a period. Your first period comes with puberty normally at between 11 and 14 years old and is called menarche. You can then become pregnant. Your last period will normally be between 49 and 52 years old and is called menopause after which you can no longer become pregnant naturally.

Your menstrual cycle is regulated by the complex interaction of hormones (luteinising hormone and follicle-stimulating hormone) and ovarian sex hormones (Oestrogen and progesterone) and can be viewed in three different phases, menses (your period), follicular (building the uterine lining and ripening an egg) and luteal (awaiting a fertilised egg implanting in the uterine lining). In the follicular phase follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) produced in your small pituitary gland at the base of your brain encourages eggs (carried in follicles) in your ovaries to ripen and produce oestrogen which nourished and thickens the uterine lining (endometrium). At the peak of the follicular phase when oestrogen peaks luteinising hormone (LH) rises and takes over control. The surge in LH causes the egg follicle to rupture usually in the following 12-24 hours (ovulation) releasing the selected egg into one of your fallopian tubes. Progesterone then rises rapidly supplied by the ruptured follicle called the corpus luteum and controls the last phase of your cycle. If your egg is fertilised and implantation takes place around 7-9 days after ovulation, then progesterone remains high and pregnancy is established. If fertilisation does not occur, then your progesterone level falls rapidly and menstruation begins.

How Does Understanding Your Cycle Help You?

If you are one of the lucky women with problem-free cycles, you can still improve your overall reproductive health by becoming more aware and in touch with how your cycle functions and what changes to look for that show a normal cycle or signs of something that needs attention. You can also use these changing signs as a form of birth control or for improving your chances of conception. This system is known by several names, but accurately called natural family planning (NFP) when avoiding pregnancy and fertility awareness method (FAM) to enhance chances of pregnancy. This method can also be used to enhance the effectiveness of other methods of contraception.

These signs, cervical mucus, basal body temperature, and positioning of the cervix, can be also be used to diagnose a healthy or abnormal cycle and determine your fertility level. When you chart these changes in your body together with mood swings, libido levels, food cravings and menstrual flow quantity, colour and consistency you can gain important knowledge of how your body changes throughout your menstrual cycle.

Taking monthly charts along to appointments is extremely beneficial for your healthcare practitioner. Not only does the information provide a clear picture of your reproductive health but allows you to ask informed questions and in the long run improve your health.

Healthy menstruation is more than treating PMS or menstrual cramps. It is understanding and honoring your unique monthly cycle. Coupling this knowledge and respect with a healthful lifestyle and, when needed, natural treatments, you can learn to enjoy and tune into your own menstrual cycle rhythm.

When to Seek Help

It is not unusual that you may experience problems with your period from time to time in your life. You may suffer from unbearable cramping pain in your lower abdomen during the first day or two of menses, this is called Dysmenorrhoea and is not normal. You may also experience irritability, food cravings and mood swings for between 1 and 7 days before your period starts, this is called pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS), if these are more than mild, this is not normal. You may also suffer excessively heavy flow. Irregular bleeding, scanty bleeding, clotted bleeding or a total absence of any bleeding at all, this is not normal. You may also experience bleeding between your periods or bleeding after sex, this is not normal. There is no need to suffer these unpleasant symptoms and are all signs that your reproductive system needs attention and assistance should be sought. Conventional medical treatment consists of pharmaceutical medications and surgery. Natural medical treatment is a very effective gentle way to treat most all these abnormalities and consists of herbal medicines, diet, lifestyle changes and sometimes acupuncture.



Our Female Healthcare Philosophy

At the Women's Natural Health Clinic, we specialise in providing comprehensive natural reproductive, gynaecological, obstetric and general healthcare for females from adolescence to post-menopause. Our approach is to integrate techniques in both oriental and western medical diagnosis to formulate a naturally oriented treatment plan combining acupuncture, herbal medicine, nutritional therapy, exercise and lifestyle. Each treatment plan is tailored specifically to each individual woman maximizing results.

Please email us at enquiries@naturalgynae.com with questions, we are more than happy to provide any information via email that will assist you in deciding which treatment approach would be best for you

For more information, contact details and appointments click here www.naturalgynae.com