

# Hope & Healing

## Menstrual Problems

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

### Introduction

American girls usually start menstruating between the ages of 12 and 13. But, some girls start at 9 or younger. So, you shouldn't wait too long to discuss the subject with your daughter. The health curriculum of many schools include classes on menstruation. You may want to talk with your daughter at the same time.

This is also a good opportunity to discuss other body changes of puberty: the appearance of pubic and underarm hair, breast development, and the expected growth spurt. Many of these changes will actually begin appearing before the first period does.

As a part of your talk you can tell your daughter that special pads and tampons are available to handle the flow. Specific instructions can be given when her first period begins.

During your talk you may want to tell your daughter that menstruation is a natural part of growing up and is not something painful or dangerous. There's another point; help her to understand that her ability to have a baby carries with it the responsibility not to have that happen before the proper time.

Of course, a girl's mother is the best person to tell her about menstruation, but, if the mother is not able to, another woman close to the girl should be asked to step in.

### The First Gynecological Exam

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists suggests that a girl see a gynecologist at age 18 or at the onset of sexual activity, whichever comes first. It is not necessary to have an exam at the first

menstrual period.

Most menstruation problems can be handled by your family doctor or pediatrician. At first the periods may be irregular and there might be mild cramping. These are common and rarely require medical attention. Severe cramping, however, may indicate some kind of problem and should be evaluated by your gynecologist.

### The Gynecological Exam

If you have a daughter who is going to her first gynecological exam the following information can make the procedures more understandable and prepare her for the intimate nature of the exam. The exam should include:

- A medical history, including onset of menstruation, menstrual cycles, knowledge of birth control methods, and sexual activity.
- Blood tests, urinalysis, height, weight, blood pressure measurements, and check of heart, lungs and abdomen.
- Breast examination and instructions for breast self-exam.
- Rectal exam.
- Pelvic exam, including visual examination of the vaginal opening, and of the cervix at the mouth of the uterus, which is visualized through a speculum that holds your vagina open.
- Manual examination by the doctor of the uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tubes, using two fingers. The doctor wears a glove for the exam.
- A Pap Test.
- a blood test for Rubella (German measles).

### Menstrual Problems

- **PMS.** PMS is a collection of physical and psychological symptoms that are a problem for about a third of women who menstruate. It begins 2 weeks or less before the onset of the period. For most women PMS is simply an inconvenience but for 5 to 10 percent it is clearly serious. Symptoms include mood swings, irritability, anxiety, fatigue, abdominal bloating, water retention, breast swelling and tenderness, headache, back and lower abdominal pain, increased appetite and cravings for sugary, salty, or high carbohydrate foods. The cause of PMS is unknown. Research is ongoing into links with thyroid disease and depression.

### The Treatment of PMS

The fact that a great list of therapies has been tried is proof enough that no single method works very well. Tried methods include: relaxation techniques, diuretics, exercise, Ibuprofen and other pain medications, Vitamin E, the avoidance of caffeine, alcohol, salt or sugar, antidepressants, anti-anxiety drugs, Vitamin B6. In a third to a half of women with PMS, the symptoms simply go away no matter what the treatment. A recent study using the drug Prozac showed great benefits for a number of women.

- **Irregular periods.** Menstrual periods normally occur every 22 to 35 days but for most women the average is 28 days. When the menstrual cycles becomes irregular, there are many possible causes. One common cause is the onset of menopause. Other causes include a loss of weight, stress, traveling, starting or stopping the pill, having an IUD inserted or taken out, thyroid problems, cervical cancer, pregnancy, and fibroids. A woman who is not menstruating consistently should see her doctor for an evaluation to determine why.
- **Bleeding between periods.** Usually the interval between two menstrual periods is free of bleeding or spotting. Many women, however, experience such bleeding, even though no serious condition is present. If you have an IUD for birth control you may have occasional spotting. If bleeding is slight and occasional, it may be ignored. On the other hand, cancer of the uterus or an abnormal pregnancy may be first suggested by bleeding between periods. A good rule of thumb: If bleeding is severe, accompanied by abdominal pain, or occurs three months in a row, see your doctor. And, remember, any bleeding after menopause should be evaluated by your doctor without waiting.
- **Heavy periods.** Your periods are abnormally heavy if they last longer than 7 days, or if you pass large clots of blood or have heavy flow. Heavy periods can be caused by hormonal disturbances, fibroids, pelvic inflammation, an IUD device, or, rarely, endometriosis. Young women may have heavy periods until they establish a regular ovulation cycle with their periods, and older women may have them as they begin menopause. Usually heavy periods are both inconvenient and distressing. It is rare, however, for them to signify a serious underlying disorder.  
One common risk is that women who bleed heavily may develop iron

deficiency anemia.

#### What To Do

If you have been having heavy periods for some time, get your doctor's evaluation. If you have one heavy period and do not believe you're pregnant, reduce your activity for 24 hours. If the bleeding does not slow down, call your doctor. If your periods are always heavy, be certain that your diet contains enough iron to avoid iron-deficiency anemia.

If your period is ever late as well as heavy you may be having an early miscarriage. In this case, see your doctor immediately. If you aren't pregnant your doctor will search for a fibroid. If none is found and if your Pap test is normal, your doctor may want to prescribe hormone tablets that are very similar to birth control pills.

If this treatment doesn't work after a few months your doctor will probably arrange for you to have diagnostic D and C, a test where the lining of the uterus is scraped to be certain that cancer isn't present.

#### Summary \_\_\_\_\_

For most women, menstruation creates no medical problems. Even the most uncomfortable symptoms aren't permanent and they don't usually indicate a serious problem. Yet, few women escape from some form of discomfort and anxiety at one stage of their life or another — in part because patterns of menstruation are as unique as are the individuals who experience them. That's why you need to learn what there is to know about menstruation, so that you can make wise decisions if you develop a menstrual abnormality.

## Awaken the Miracles Within You

### The Miracle of Truth

The Bible says, "The truth will set you free."

In this age we spread the truth through books and pamphlets. We convey the message but the one receiving it will naturally wait until he or she is ready before reading it.

Here's the miracle of the truth:

Mr. Smith gives Mr. Brown a pamphlet. Mr. Brown reads the information and tries it. It works.

Mr. Brown approaches the idea to Mr. Jones at work. Jones isn't interested but the cover attracts him. He lays it on his desk. His secretary, Mrs. Robinson, takes the pamphlet home, studies it and tries the advice. It works. She mails the pamphlet to her brother who is hungry for a living faith. The truth sets him free.

*The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.*