

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a normal menstrual cycle?

A [menstrual cycle](#) is counted from the first day of bleeding of one [menstrual period](#) to the first day of bleeding of the next period. Most teens have a menstrual cycle that lasts between 21 and 45 days. A typical period lasts 2 to 7 days, with the heaviest bleeding in the first 3 days.

When is a menstrual cycle not normal?

Menstrual cycles in teens often are irregular, especially in the first few years after they start. Having an irregular cycle means the number of days between your periods changes a lot from month to month. There may be a problem if:

- You are 15 or older and have never had a period
- It has been 3 years since your breasts developed and you have never had a period
- You are 14 or older, have never had a period, and you have an eating disorder, exercise a lot, or have hirsutism (excessive body hair growth)
- Your periods were regular each month and then they stopped being regular
- Your period comes more often than every 21 days or less often than every 45 days
- Your periods come more than 90 days apart, even for one cycle
- Your period lasts more than 7 days

When is bleeding not normal?

Heavy bleeding is not normal and may need treatment if:

- You have to change your tampon or pad more than once every 1 to 2 hours
- Your period lasts more than 7 days
- You or a family member have a problem with blood clotting
- You feel dizzy or faint

What causes abnormal periods?

Some causes of abnormal periods may include:

- Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)
- Bleeding disorders
- Eating disorders or extreme exercise
- Sexually transmitted diseases (STIs)
- A growth in the uterus, such as a polyp
- Hormonal problems, such as a problem with ovulation or with the thyroid gland

When should I talk with my doctor about my period?

If you have any concerns about your period, talk with your obstetrician–gynecologist (ob-gyn) or other health care professional. You also should see your doctor if you have any of the signs of heavy bleeding or abnormal cycle length listed above.

How are period problems diagnosed?

To find out what is causing trouble with your periods, your doctor may ask about your personal and family health history. The questions may cover past and current illnesses, medical procedures, pregnancies, and medication. You also may be asked to keep a chart of when you are bleeding and how much.

You may have a pelvic exam, pregnancy test, and tests for STIs. Based on your symptoms and your age, other tests may be needed, such as blood tests and an

ultrasound exam .

How are period problems treated?

Teens with heavy bleeding often benefit from treatment with [hormone](#) medication, such as [birth control](#) pills or a hormonal [intrauterine device \(IUD\)](#) . If you are anemic, you may take iron pills. If your period problems are caused by a medical condition, you and your doctor should discuss treatment options for that condition.

What should I know about bleeding disorders?

Bleeding disorders are problems with how your blood clots. In women and girls, heavy periods are the most common sign of a bleeding disorder. But having heavy periods does not automatically mean that you have a bleeding disorder.

The most common bleeding disorder is [Von Willebrand disease](#) . It is inherited, meaning it runs in families. If you or anyone in your family has a problem with blood clotting, you should tell your doctor so you can be screened for a bleeding disorder.

Glossary

Birth Control: Devices or medications used to prevent pregnancy.

Bleeding Disorders: Conditions in which there is a problem with the body's blood clotting process.

Hormone: A substance made in the body that controls the function of cells or organs.

Intrauterine Device (IUD): A small device that is inserted and left inside the uterus to prevent pregnancy.

Menstrual Cycle: The monthly process of changes that occur to prepare a woman's body for possible pregnancy. A menstrual cycle is defined as the first day of menstrual bleeding of one cycle to the first day of menstrual bleeding of the next cycle.

Menstrual Period: The monthly shedding of blood and tissue from the uterus.

Obstetrician–Gynecologist (Ob-Gyn): A doctor with special training and education in women's health.

Ovulation: The time when an ovary releases an egg.

Pelvic Exam: A physical examination of a woman's pelvic organs.

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS): A condition that leads to a hormone imbalance that affects a woman's monthly menstrual periods, ovulation, ability to get pregnant, and metabolism.

Polyp: An abnormal tissue growth that can develop on the inside of an organ.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): Infections that are spread by sexual contact.

Thyroid Gland: A butterfly-shaped gland located at the base of the neck in front of the windpipe. This gland makes, stores, and releases thyroid hormone, which controls the body's metabolism and regulates how parts of the body work.

Ultrasound exam: A test in which sound waves are used to examine inner parts of the body. During pregnancy, ultrasound can be used to check the fetus.

Uterus: A muscular organ in the female pelvis. During pregnancy, this organ holds and nourishes the fetus. It is also called the womb.

Von Willebrand Disease: A disorder in which the blood does not clot well.

If you have further questions, contact your ob-gyn.

Don't have an ob-gyn? [Learn how to find a doctor near you.](#)

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