

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How common is period pain?

Feeling pain before or during your [menstrual period](#) is very common. More than half of women and girls with periods have some pain for 1 to 2 days each month.

### What does period pain feel like?

Symptoms related to painful periods can include:

- Muscle cramps in your lower belly or back
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Headaches

If pain during your period is severe, you also may have trouble sleeping.

### What causes period pain?

During your period, your [uterus](#) contracts. Your uterus also releases natural chemicals called [prostaglandins](#). These chemicals can cause cramps.

Period pain also can be caused by medical conditions, including

- Endometriosis
- Cysts in the ovaries
- Adenomyosis
- Fibroids

Period pain that is caused by a medical condition may get worse over time.

## When should I see a doctor about period pain?

No matter if your period pain is mild or severe, you can ask your [obstetrician–gynecologist \(ob-gyn\)](#) or other health care professional for help. Period pain can cause you to miss school or work, or it can disrupt your everyday activities. It is especially important to get help if your pain is severe, feels worse than usual, or is making your life hard every month.

## How is period pain treated?

There are several ways to treat period pain. Most period pain in teens is treated with medication:

- Pain relievers, such as ibuprofen, may ease your cramps. It may work best if you start taking a pain reliever 1 to 2 days before your period and continue through the first 2 to 3 days of bleeding.
- Hormone treatment, such as [birth control](#) pills or a hormonal [intrauterine device \(IUD\)](#), also may lessen period pain.

If medication does not relieve the pain, your doctor may suggest tests to find the cause. A different treatment may be needed if you have a medical condition such as endometriosis or fibroids.

## What tests are done to find the cause of period pain?

Your doctor should review your medical history, including your symptoms and [menstrual cycle](#). They may recommend a [pelvic exam](#) or an [ultrasound exam](#).

If it seems that your period pain may be caused by a medical condition, your doctor also may discuss a [laparoscopy](#) . This is surgery to look inside the pelvic region.

## What are some self-care tips for period pain?

You may find it helpful to try:

- Exercising regularly throughout each month
- Taking a warm bath or putting a heating pad or hot water bottle on your abdomen or lower back
- Getting more sleep, especially right before and during your period

## What should I know about endometriosis?

Endometriosis is the most common medical condition that causes period pain. In this condition, tissue from the lining of the uterus is found outside the uterus. The tissue breaks down and bleeds in response to changes in [hormones](#) . This happens in the same way the lining of the uterus breaks down and bleeds each month during your period.

Ob-gyns may use laparoscopy to diagnose and treat endometriosis. Medications that suppress hormones also may be used to manage endometriosis.

Endometriosis is a long-lasting condition that may be challenging to treat. Ongoing education and support may be helpful. See [Endometriosis](#) to learn more. Other resources include the [Endometriosis Foundation of America](#) and the [Endometriosis Association](#).

## Glossary

**Adenomyosis:** A condition in which the tissue that normally lines the uterus begins to grow in the muscle wall of the uterus.

**Birth Control:** Devices or medications used to prevent pregnancy.

**Cyst:** A sac or pouch filled with fluid.

**Endometriosis:** A condition in which tissue that lines the uterus is found outside the uterus, usually on the ovaries, fallopian tubes, and other pelvic structures.

**Fibroids:** Growths that form in the muscle of the uterus. Fibroids usually are noncancerous.

**Hormones:** Substances made in the body that control the function of cells of organs.

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

**Laparoscopy:** A surgical procedure in which a thin, lighted telescope called a laparoscope is inserted through a small incision (cut) in the abdomen. The laparoscope is used to view the pelvic organs. Other instruments can be used with it to perform surgery.

**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.

**Ovaries:** Organs in women that contain the eggs necessary to get pregnant and make important hormones, such as estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone.

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

**Prostaglandins:** Chemicals that are made by the body that have many effects, including causing the muscles of the uterus to contract, usually causing cramps.

**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. Also called the womb.

---

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

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

TFAQ009

Published: October 2020

Last reviewed: August 2022

*Copyright 2024 by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. All rights reserved. Read [copyright and permissions information.](#)*

*This information is designed as an educational aid for the public. It offers current information and opinions related to women's health. It is not intended as a statement of the standard of care. It does not explain all of the proper treatments or methods of care. It is not a substitute for the advice of a physician. Read [ACOG's complete disclaimer.](#)*

About ACOG

Disclaimer

Contact Us

How to Find an Ob-Gyn



Copyright 2024 American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Privacy Statement

|

Terms and Conditions of Use