Dysmenorrhea
(Painful Periods)

Menstrual pain is caused by the muscles of the uterus tightening (*contracting*) during a menstrual period. The muscles of the uterus contract due to the chemicals in the uterine lining.

Primary dysmenorrhea is menstrual cramps that last a couple of days when you start having menstrual periods or soon after. This often begins after a teenager starts having her period. As a woman gets older or has a baby, the cramps will usually lesson or disappear.

Secondary dysmenorrhea begins later in life, lasts longer and the pain may be stronger than primary dysmenorrhea. The pain may start before the period and last a few days after the period. This type of dysmenorrhea is usually caused by an underlying problem such as:

- The tissue lining of uterus grows outside of the uterus in other areas of the body (*endometriosis*).
- The endometrial tissue, which normally lines the uterus, is found in, or grows into the muscular walls of the uterus (*adenomyosis*).
- The pelvic blood vessels get engorged with blood just before the menstrual period (*pelvic congestive syndrome*).
- Overgrowth of cells in the lining of the uterus or cervix (*polyps* of the uterus or cervix).
- Falling down of the uterus (*prolapse*) because of loose and stretched ligaments.
- Depression.
- Bladder problems, infection or inflammation.
- Problems with the intestine, a tumor or irritable bowel syndrome.
- Cancer of the female organs or bladder.
- A severely tipped uterus.
- A very tight opening or closed cervix.
- Noncancerous tumors of the uterus (*fibroids*).
- Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).
- Pelvic adhesions from a previous surgery. Adhesions are scar like tissue.
- Ovarian cyst.
- An intrauterine device (IUD) used for birth control.

CAUSES
The cause of menstrual pain is often unknown.

SYMPTOMS
- Cramping or throbbing pain in your lower abdomen.
- Sometimes, a woman may also experience headaches.
- Lower back pain.
- Feeling sick to your stomach (*nausea*) or vomiting.
- Diarrhea.
- Sweating or dizziness.

DIAGNOSIS OF DYSMENORRHEA:
- Your caregiver will take a medical and menstrual history from you regarding the type, length and occurrence of your pain.
- Blood tests may be taken.
- An ultrasound may be done.
- A 'D & C' may be done.
- Looking inside your abdomen and pelvis with a scope (*laparoscopy*) may be necessary.
- X-rays.
- CT Scan.
- MRI.
- Your caregiver may look in the bladder with a scope and light (*cystoscopy*), if there are bladder problems.

- Looking in the intestine or stomach with a scope with a light on it (*colonoscopy*, *gastroscopy*), if problems with the intestine are suspected.

TREATMENT

Treatment depends on the cause of the dysmenorrhea. Treatment may include:

- Pain medication prescribed by your caregiver.
- Birth control pills.
- Hormone replacement therapy.
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID's). These may help stop the production of prostaglandins.
- An IUD with progesterone hormone in it.
- Acupuncture.
- Surgery to remove adhesions, endometriosis, ovarian cyst or fibroids.
- Removal of the uterus (*hysterectomy*).
- Progesterone shots to stop the menstrual period.
- Cutting the nerves on the sacrum that go to the female organs (*presacral neurectomy*).
- Electric currant to the sacral nerves (*sacral nerve stimulation*).
- Anti-depression medication for depression.
- Psychiatric therapy, counseling or group therapy may be needed.
- Exercise and physical therapy can help decrease or stop the pain.
- Meditation and yoga therapy may be helpful to control or stop the pain.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Use aerobic exercises, walking, swimming, biking, and other exercises to help lessen the cramping.
- Meditation therapy and yoga may help.
- It is important to see your caregiver for evaluation if menstrual pain is so severe that it interferes with normal activities.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- The pain does not get better with medication.
- You have pain with sexual intercourse.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your pain increases and is not controlled with medications.
- An unexplained oral temperature above 102.0º F (38.9º C) develops during your period.
- You develop nausea or vomiting with your period not controlled with medication.
- You have abnormal vaginal bleeding with your period.
- You pass out.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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