

PERIOD PAIN

INTRODUCTION

Period pain also affects up to 1 in 2 women. It is usually a cramping pain in the lower abdomen. It begins shortly before the period starts and lessens after menstruation begins and disappears after the first day or two. The problem is most common in women under 25 and often disappears after having children.

SYMPTOMS

- Lower abdominal and/or pelvic pain, which may radiate to your lower back and down your thighs.
- These pains are described as cramps.
- Pain commonly lasts for between 8 and 24 hours (but may last for up to 72 hours).
- About 1 in 20 women experience more serious symptoms such as headache, diarrhoea, tiredness, faintness and nausea.

CAUSES

The cause of period pain is not certain. Hormones, called prostaglandins cause the womb to contract and shed the lining of the womb during your period. It may be that those women who have bad period pains produce higher levels of prostaglandins, or that they are more sensitive to these hormones.

Certain contraceptive intra-uterine devices (IUDs) may cause period pains in some women and removing the device may reduce period pain.

Period pains can sometimes be the result of an underlying gynaecological condition e.g. endometriosis, adhesions, fibroids, infection of the uterus (pelvic infection), or pelvic inflammatory disease.

TREATMENT

Drug treatments

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID's) are painkillers that help with the pain in 80% of women. They block the effect of the prostaglandins that cause the contractions. The NSAID ibuprofen (Nurofen[®]) can be bought over the counter at your pharmacy.
- Paracetamol should be considered if the pain is mild or when NSAID's are not suitable.
- Feminax[®] is an effective over the counter treatment available over the counter at your pharmacy. It contains paracetamol and codeine to relieve pain and an anti-spasmodic ingredient to relieve stomach cramps.

- The combined oral contraceptive has the affect of thinning the lining of the womb and suppressing ovulation, so the amount of prostaglandin is reduced. Period pains are less likely if you take the contraceptive pill.
- Medicines that suppress menstruation are occasionally prescribed by a specialist for resistant period pain.

Non-drug treatments

- Heat applied to the area of pain may help with pain relief (e.g.) holding a hot water bottle to the lower abdomen. A warm bath may also be soothing.
- In Whelehans, we find Cura-Heat[®] period pain patches provide excellent relief for period pain. They are non-medicinal and provide continuous relief for 12 hours.
- Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) may help relieve period pain. TENS give out a small electrical current and works by altering how your body receives pain signals.
- Some women find that acupuncture is helpful.
- Moderate physical exercise may also help with relieving pain.
- A contraceptive intra-uterine system (an IUS), which slowly releases a hormone that thins the lining of the womb helps with relieving pain in addition to providing contraception

Disclaimer: Information given is suitable for the person above only; Please ensure you consult with your healthcare professional before making any changes recommended

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