

Menstrual Cramps

Definition

- Cramps in the lower belly or pelvis. They start during the first 1 or 2 days of a girl's period.
- Cramps only happen during menstrual bleeding
- Report of cramps in the past are helpful
- Cramps often don't start until periods are present for over 1 year

Health Information

Cause

- Normal cramps happen in over 60% of girls.
- This cramping is caused by strong muscle squeezing of the uterus. This is triggered by a high prostaglandin (a hormone) level.
- An egg release from the ovary (ovulation) is needed to cause cramping. Therefore, the onset is most often 12 months or more after the first period.
- The medical name for painful cramping during a girl's period is dysmenorrhea.

Age of Onset of Menstrual Cramps

- Peak age of onset: 1 to 2 years after periods first start
- During the first year after periods start, only 7% or less of teens will have cramping. Some of these girls will have a medical cause such as a blockage.

Pain Scale

- **Mild:** Your child feels pain and tells you about it. But, the pain does not keep your child from any normal activities. School, play and sleep are not changed.
- **Moderate:** The pain keeps your child from doing some normal activities. It may wake her from sleep.
- **Severe:** The pain is very bad. It keeps your child from doing all normal activities.

Care Advice

1. **Overview on Menstrual Cramps:**
 - Cramps happen in over 60% of girls.
 - Pain medicines can keep cramps to a mild level.
 - Cramps can last 2 or 3 days.
 - Here is some care advice that should help.
2. **Ibuprofen for Pain:**
 - Give 2 ibuprofen 200 mg tablets 3 times per day for 3 days.
 - The first dose should be 3 tablets (600 mg) if the teen weighs over 100 pounds (45 kg).
 - Take with food.
 - Ibuprofen is a very good drug for cramps. Advil and Motrin are some of the brand names. No prescription is needed.
 - The drug should be started as soon as there is any menstrual flow. If you can, start it the day before. Don't wait for cramps to start.
 - Note: acetaminophen products (such as Tylenol) are not helpful for menstrual cramps.

3. **Naproxen if Ibuprofen Doesn't Help:**

- If your teen has tried ibuprofen with no pain relief, switch to naproxen. No prescription is needed.
- Give 220 mg (1 tablet) every 8 hours for 2 or 3 days.
- The first dose should be 2 tablets (440 mg) if the teen weighs over 100 pounds (45 kg).
- Take with food.

4. **Use Heat for Pain:**

- Use a heating pad or warm washcloth to the lower belly. Do this for 20 minutes 2 times per day. This may help to reduce pain.
- A warm bath may also help.

5. **Stay Active:**

- It's fine to go to school.
- Your teen can take part in sports during her period.
- She can also swim, bathe, or shower like normal.

6. **What to Expect:**

- Cramps last 2 or 3 days.
- They will often happen with each period.
- The cramps sometimes go away for good after the first pregnancy and delivery.

Call Your Doctor If

- Neither ibuprofen or naproxen helps the pain
- Cramps cause her to miss school or other events
- Pain lasts over 3 days
- You think your teen needs to be seen

Pediatric Care Advice

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