

MENSTRUAL CRAMPS

Four out of five women have menstrual cramps. They may be a common occurrence, but this does not mean that they are not a problem! If you ever miss school or work because of cramps, you should talk to your doctor about possible treatments.

Symptoms

- Mild to severe lower abdominal cramping
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Dizziness, headache, or fainting
- Backaches or thigh pain

The symptoms are usually most severe on the first day of the period; however, some women have cramps that last through their whole period.

Cause

Cramps may be caused by a serious problem, such as an infection of the uterus, endometriosis, or a physical abnormality. Most menstrual cramps, however, are caused by chemicals called **prostaglandins**, which are released by your body when your period starts. Prostaglandins cause the uterine muscles to contract to expel the lining formed in the uterus as it prepares each month for a possible pregnancy. The contractions of the uterus are what you experience as cramps.

Treatment

Different treatments work for different women. You may have to experiment to find what works best for you.

Lying down with a warm heating pad on your abdomen may help. Medicines such as **ibuprofen** (found in Advil or Motrin) actually prevent prostaglandins from being made. You should take 600 mg ibuprofen (3 small pills) three to four times a day for the first 2 days of your period. Do not wait for your cramps to get bad before starting to take the medicine; remember, you are trying to *prevent* the cramps. Be sure to take ibuprofen with food. Massage can be helpful. Exercises that stretch your body also help to keep blood flowing in the pelvis, easing the heavy, bloated feeling.

Make an Appointment With Your Doctor If:

- You have tried this treatment and are not better
- You have had unprotected sex and might have an STD
- You experience painful intercourse or have a foul-smelling vaginal discharge
- Your cramps are much worse than usual

- Your periods become irregular or late