

# Like clockwork

from Dr. Laura Corio, M.D.

Women's Health Issues

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## Your Period

You refer to it as your friend but more likely you think of it as your frenemy. You dread having it but the month it doesn't show up, you stress about missing it. Yes, menstruation is one of those things that defines a woman like no other yet it is also one of those things that we as women feel most ambivalent about. It causes us countless problems (not to mention considerable discomfort) but we depend on it for information about everything from puberty to sickness to pregnancy to menopause. Even the most informed among us have questions about why our periods don't always operate as smoothly as they should. Here are the answers to three questions about periods I am asked the most often.

### What is PMS?

PMS, or premenstrual syndrome, occurs because your body is sensitive to hormonal changes; in the week or 10 days before your period comes, the levels of progesterone and estrogen change rapidly and this can cause symptoms such as bloating, mood swings, headache, breast tenderness, and fatigue in some women. As many as 90% of women experience some symptoms before their period, according to a study in the Archives of Internal Medicine, but many fewer -- 20% or less -- have symptoms severe enough to interfere with normal activities and relationships. You can counteract PMS by exercising, eating right and drinking enough water to avoid dehydration. Stay away from caffeine, alcohol and sodium, especially the week or so before your period. We may try bio-identical hormones, herbal remedies or switching your birth control method to deal with your discomfort. We may also discuss how to deal with individual symptoms on a case by case basis. For example, if your issue is moodiness, I may recommend extra calcium and Vitamin D, evening primrose oil and B vitamins. The important thing is you don't need to suffer in silence. If PMS is disrupting your ability to function, let's deal with it.

### Why are my cycles irregular?

Typically a "regular" cycle is between 21 and 35 days, counting from the first day of bleeding to the start of your next period. Some women don't ovulate regularly and therefore have irregular periods. PCOS (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome) is a condition where women do not ovulate, have increased hair growth, acne and difficulty losing weight. Stress and illness can also adversely affect the cycle; so can weight loss or weight gain, exercise, or hormonal fluctuations. And some women simply don't get their period like clockwork every month so the day they begin menstruation varies. Or could it be that you have a bad memory? If you don't keep a menstrual calendar your recall of when you got your last period may not be accurate. If you typically do menstruate on a fairly reliable basis and skip a month or are a little off from time to time it's probably no reason for worry. However, if your cycles are irregular for several months, you should come in for a check up to see what's going on. Oh, and if you miss a period and pregnancy is a possibility, you need to check that out too of course!

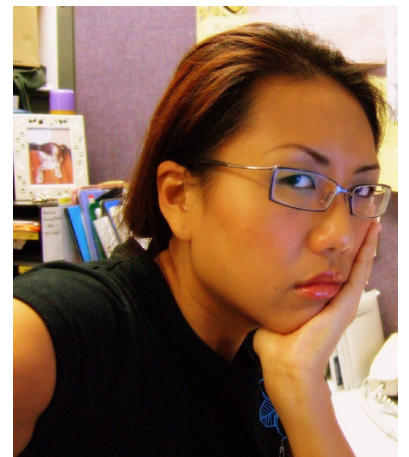
### What is a normal flow?

Here again to some extent "normal" is going to mean what is normal for you. That said, a normal period will typically last for no more than seven days. The average woman will bleed 2-8 tablespoons of blood during the span of a single period -- though trust me, I know at times it probably seems like more than that! During your period you shouldn't need more than one tampon or sanitary pad every couple of hours. If your bleed is so heavy that you have to plan your activities around it or you experience flooding like the turning on of a tap or you have clumps larger than the size of a nickel in your flow -- a condition known as menorrhagia -- make an appointment with me to have it checked out. Heavy flow can be a sign of out of whack hormones, especially as you approach menopausal age, but it can also be a sign of underlying problems such as uterine fibroids or polyps, a thyroid condition, diabetes or even cancer.



### Women and PMS

Fifty-nine percent of women suffer from headaches during their periods.



### Dr. Corio's Resources

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## PEARLS

**The Question:** What exactly is my period anyway?

**Dr. Corio Says:** Your internal sex organs consist of two ovaries which contain the eggs you are born with, the Fallopian tubes, the uterus (womb) and the vagina. Each time you have your period, a single egg ripens and matures due to the action of hormones circulating in the bloodstream and the mature egg bursts from the ovary and drifts through the Fallopian tube down into the uterus. The lining of the uterus - the endometrium - is thickened by hormones and is ready to receive the fertilized egg. However, if you aren't pregnant the egg is unfertilized and resultant hormonal changes cause the endometrium to slip away; that's when menstruation begins. The monthly bleed you experience as your period is comprised of the endometrium itself and a little fresh blood caused by the breaking of very fine blood vessels within the endometrium as it detaches itself from the inside of the uterus.

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**The Question:** What is menopause and how can I tell if I have entered it?

**Dr. Corio Says:** Natural menopause is the permanent ending of menstruation that is not brought on by any type of medical treatment. For women undergoing natural menopause, the process is gradual and is described in three stages. The first stage is perimenopause which is the decade or so before menopause; this is when the ovaries gradually produce less estrogen. In the last one to two years of perimenopause, the decrease in estrogen accelerates and many women experience menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, irregular periods, moodiness, changes in sex drive -- the list goes on. Official menopause is when it's been a year since your last menstrual period. At this stage, the ovaries have stopped releasing eggs and producing most of their estrogen. Post-menopause marks the years after menopause. During this stage, menopausal symptoms, such as hot flashes, ease for most women. However, health risks related to the loss of estrogen increase as the woman ages.

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Sources: WebMD, Uptodate.com

## Doctor & Office Hours

### Doctor's Hours

Monday	12:00 PM-6:00 PM
Tuesday	9:00 AM-3:00 PM
Wednesday	9:30 AM-2:30 PM
Thursday	8:00 AM-2:00 PM

### Office Hours

Monday	10:00 AM-5:00 PM
Tuesday – Friday	9:00 AM-4:00 PM

Make an Appointment

Call 646-422-0730 during our normal office hours.



## News Flash

Some girls are now reaching puberty at an age when they are still interested in Dora the Explorer and dolls.. Researchers looked at a sample of 1,000 girls and found that they started onset of puberty at an average age of 9 years and 10 months -- an entire year earlier than when a similar group of girls was examined in 1991. The research was carried out in Denmark in 2006, the latest year for which figures were available, but experts believe the trend applies to the rest of the developed world as well. As for why, the finger seems to point to several culprits with no clear answers. Studies have shown early puberty in obese women and delayed puberty in thin ballet dancers. One study found that girls growing up in stressed families reach puberty earlier. And a number of toxins, particularly bisphenol A (BPA) and phthalates, are thought to speed up puberty.