



**Health Professionals
Committed to the
Reproductive Needs of
Children and Adolescents**

Painful Periods (Dysmenorrhea)

Is it ok to have pain with my period?

Most girls have some pain with their period. It can happen before your period starts or with bleeding. This pain is known as menstrual cramps. Health care providers call this dysmenorrhea. It is very normal and very common.

When should I take medicine for cramps?

It is important to take your NSAID medicine BEFORE your cramps are severe. Once the cramps start, the prostaglandins start to build up and then the medicine doesn't work as well. You can take this medicine regularly during the time you have cramps and not just once in a while. You can even take the medicine just before your period and cramps are supposed to start. You can talk to your provider to make sure you are taking the right dose of medication. You should always take NSAIDs with food as they can irritate your stomach.

Why do I have cramps?

Menstrual cramps are caused by the contractions of the muscles of your uterus. Your uterus makes prostaglandins that make your uterus contract. Over the counter medicines called NSAIDs block the effect of prostaglandins which decreases menstrual cramps. Ibuprofen (the ingredient in Advil®, Aleve® and Motrin®) is an NSAID medication and can be very effective in stopping menstrual cramps.

What will my healthcare provider do if my periods are very painful?

First your provider will want to know more about your periods—how often they come, when your pain started and how much pain you have. Then he/she will want to know about what medicines you have tried and when you are taking these medicines. They may be able to change the way you are using you're over the counter medicines to make them more effective.

What can I do if I have pain with my period?

If you have pain with your period, you can use over the counter medication to treat the pain. NSAIDs like Advil® and Motrin® work best on cramps. You should talk to your provider about how much and how often to take these medicines. You can also use a heating pad to help with cramping. Regular exercise has also been shown to help with menstrual cramps. If you use these medicines and still have pain you should talk to your provider about other treatment options.

If over the counter medicines have not been working for you, your health care provider will want to discuss using hormones to help stop your cramping. These hormones usually come in the form of birth control. Birth control is a very safe and very effective way to treat menstrual cramps. Many girls use birth control to treat their cramps even though they have no need for birth control.