

WHAT ARE MENSTRUAL CRAMPS?

- Medical term is dysmenorrhea (dis-men-o-ree-a), which means painful periods.
- More than half of women have menstrual cramps.
- Can feel like sharp cramping or a dull ache in the lower abdomen (belly) at the time of your period.
- Can range from a mild discomfort to severe pain.
- May begin just before your period starts, and for the first or second day of your period.
- Can include aching feeling in your back, inner thighs or even in the vagina.
- Some women may also have nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, light-headedness.



WHAT CAUSES MENSTRUAL CRAMPS?

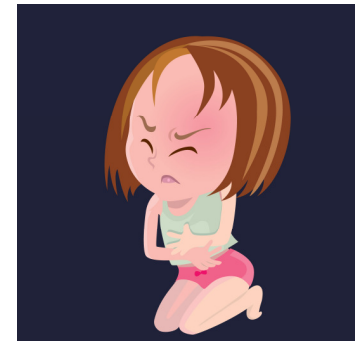
- The uterus is a muscle. The uterus contracts (flexes) at the time of your period to help the blood and tissue leave the uterus. When the uterus contracts, you may feel it as a cramping pain.
- A hormone-like substance called prostaglandin is what makes the uterus contract and causes the cramps. Prostaglandins are made by the lining of the uterus (endometrium).
- Some women's bodies produce higher levels of prostaglandin. This can cause stronger contractions and stronger cramps.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

Everyone is different, but some of these things may help your symptoms:

- Try lying on your side with your knees pulled up.
- Apply heat with a heating pad or take a warm bath.
- Gently massage your abdomen.
- Sleep – getting enough sleep can help you cope with the discomfort.
- Regular exercise – this can produce chemicals (endorphins) that can help fight pain.
- Eat healthy foods.

- Medication: NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) such as ibuprofen (eg. Motrin, Advil) or naproxen sodium (eg. Aleve) can help menstrual cramps. They should be taken with food, and work best if taken just before or as cramps are starting. These medications work by lowering the level of prostaglandin. They are available without a prescription, however you should check with a parent or your healthcare provider to make sure these medications are right for you. Never take more than what is recommended on the label.



WHEN SHOULD I SEE MY DOCTOR OR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER?

- You have pain that is not helped by the suggestions listed in this pamphlet.
- Your cramps cause you to miss school or other activities.
- You have pain when you are not having your period or pain that continues after your period has ended.

WHAT CAN MY DOCTOR OR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER DO?

- May be able to prescribe stronger pain fighting medication.
- May prescribe hormone medication such as the birth control pill which can help make your periods less heavy and less painful.
- **Rarely, severe cramps and pain may not be because of your period. There may be other health reasons. A doctor may do other tests to help figure this out.

MYTH: MENSTRUAL CRAMPS ARE THE SAME THING AS “PMS”.

- Menstrual cramps are **not** the same as PMS (pre-menstrual syndrome).
- PMS is a collection of physical and emotional symptoms and can include mood changes, bloating, weight gain, difficulty concentrating and many others.
- Symptoms of PMS happen a week or two before your period and improve when your period starts.
- Not all women get PMS.



For more information about menstrual cramps contact “The Clinic” at 519-663-5446, or the Public Health Nurse in your school.

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