

MANAGING THE PAINFUL PERIOD IN SPORT

Athlete Information Sheet

Pain and cramping that occurs during periods is known as **dysmenorrhoea**.

Often symptoms start around the beginning of a menstrual period and may last 3-4 days.

Pain is usually localised to the lower belly, back or upper legs and tends to be a deep ache, often with a feeling of pressure.

With the pain, there may also be nausea/vomiting, fatigue and even diarrhoea.

What Causes Dysmenorrhoea?

A hormone (prostaglandin) is released during the menstrual period that causes the uterus (womb) to contract (cramp). The cramp may cut off the blood and oxygen supply to the muscle of the uterus, causing pain.

Primary Dysmenorrhoea

This refers to common menstrual pain and cramps, when no disease is present.

Primary dysmenorrhoea is common in young women and often improves with age and / or after childbirth.

Secondary Dysmenorrhoea

By contrast, secondary dysmenorrhoea results from an abnormality of some part of the reproductive organs.

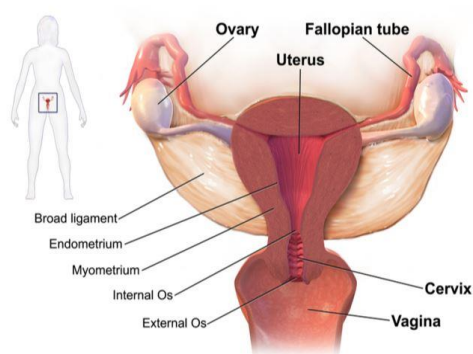
While the nature of the pain is often similar to primary dysmenorrhea, the pain may start earlier in the cycle before menstruation begins,

last for longer and it doesn't tend to have associated symptoms.

Secondary dysmenorrhoea is more common in older women.

Common causes of secondary dysmenorrhea include:

- **Endometriosis:** when the internal uterine lining (known as the endometrium) is found outside the uterus, such as on the bowel, ovaries or other organs
- **Adenomyosis:** when the internal uterine lining grows into the deeper layers of muscle in the uterus wall
- **Fibroids:** benign growths in the muscular wall of the uterus



Should I be worried about period pain?

It is not normal for period pain and cramps to be so bad as to not be able to attend, or effectively perform, schoolwork, study, work, or training.

If pain during a period is affecting study, work or training, it is important to consult a General Practitioner, Sports Doctor/Physician or Sport Medical Director.

A Doctor will want to understand the woman's medical history, perform an examination, take some blood tests (including hormone levels), and sometimes a perform a pelvic ultrasound scan.

There are a range of treatment options including getting the right pain relief, using hormonal medication, or other interventions depending on the cause of the dysmenorrhea.

What can be done to help during painful periods?

Simple ways of minimising the pain of periods include:

- Applying a heat pack to the lower back or belly
- Rest or exercise (everyone responds differently)!
- Avoid or minimise intake of caffeine, alcohol or smoking (always)
- Gentle massage to the lower back
- Over the counter medication:
 - Pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen - take regularly and start prior to pain becoming very severe
 - Regular paracetamol (2 tablets every 4 hours, maximum of 4 times in 24 hours) will help other pain relief be more effective
 - Remember, as ibuprofen is an anti-inflammatory it must be taken with food (usual dose 200mg-400mg up to three times daily)

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