

MCLA Health Services

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Self Care Sheets

Menstrual Cramps

The medical term for painful menstrual cramps is **dysmenorrhea**. It usually starts during the first 1-2 days of a period and can last generally for about 2 days. Painful menstrual cramps are more common in women younger than 20, associated with heavier bleeding and longer periods, women who started having their periods at an earlier age, smokers, women who have never delivered a baby and if there is a family history. During your period the uterus contracts to help expel its lining. Hormone like substances called prostaglandins which are involved in pain and inflammation trigger the uterus to contract. Signs and symptoms of dysmenorrhea are a constant pain in the lower abdomen with spasms or waves of cramping pain. The pain can spread to the back and thighs. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, head ache, back ache, tiredness, dizziness and nervousness.

Home Care and Prevention

- ⇒ Use a heating pad on your lower abdomen for 20 minutes at a time.
- ⇒ Take a warm bath.
- ⇒ Take over-the-counter medication like Ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®) or naproxen (Aleve®) as directed on the bottle or by your health care provider.
- ⇒ Being prescribed oral birth control pills by a health care provider can reduce the severity of menstrual cramps.
- ⇒ Exercise may reduce the pain of menstrual cramping.
- ⇒ Maintain regular activities.
- ⇒ Some vitamin and mineral supplements can be helpful and are recommended by health care providers.

When do menstrual cramps need additional medical care?

- ⇒ If you have a fever
- ⇒ Your symptoms are worsening or severe
- ⇒ If you have any unusual vaginal discharge
- ⇒ If you have associated weakness and dizziness
- ⇒ It is possible that dysmenorrhea has a medical cause for example endometriosis, uterine fibroids or pelvic inflammatory disease

Follow up at Health Services for evaluation and further treatment if you are concerned or your symptoms are worsening and not relieved with the home care treatments.