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Menstrual Irregularities – Why does this happen?

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Menstrual Irregularities are a physical or emotional problem that interferes with the normal menstrual cycle, causing pain, unusually heavy or light bleeding, delayed menarche (first menstrual period of a girl in puberty), or missed periods.

Typically, a woman of childbearing age should menstruate every 28 days or so unless she's pregnant or moving into menopause.

When not caused by pregnancy, menstrual irregularities are usually a sign of a larger condition or problem. There are many conditions that can cause menstrual irregularities and affect female fertility:

- **Amenorrhea** occurs when a woman does not get her period by age 16, or when she stops getting her period for at least three months and is not pregnant.

Amenorrhea is not a disease. Instead, it is a symptom of another condition. Possible causes can include moderate or excessive exercising, eating disorders (such as anorexia nervosa), physical or psychological stress, tumors, and hormonal problems. Women with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) may also experience amenorrhea.

Treatment for amenorrhea depends on the underlying cause.

- **Oligomenorrhea** – (pronounced oh-lyg-oh-men-or-ee-uh) This term refers to infrequent menstrual periods, or having a period only now and then. Like amenorrhea, oligomenorrhea is not a disease itself, but is a symptom of a larger condition.
- **Premature Ovarian Failure (POF)** describes a stop in the normal functioning of the ovaries in a woman younger than age 40. Women with POF may not have periods or may get them irregularly. Although women with POF may have more problems getting pregnant, it may still be possible.

There is no proven treatment to make a woman's ovaries work normally.

- **Uterine fibroids** are the most common, non-cancerous tumors in women of childbearing age. Most women with fibroids do not have problems with fertility and can get pregnant. But some women with fibroids may not be able to get pregnant naturally and turn to methods of assisted reproduction.

Women who have uterine fibroids but show no symptoms may not need any type of infertility treatment. Some women with fibroids have heavy menstrual periods, and some may bleed in between periods. Medications can often offer relief from many of the symptoms of fibroids, such as pain, and can even slow or stop their growth. There are also several types of surgery that can remove the fibroids.

- **Endometriosis** occurs when tissues that usually grow inside a woman's uterus grow on the outside instead. Endometriosis may cause pain before and during the first few days of the menstrual period. About 30 percent to 50 percent of women with endometriosis are infertile, making it one of the top three causes for female infertility. Women with endometriosis may also have very heavy periods.

There are several ways to treat pain, including pain medication, hormone therapy, and surgery.



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There are also some treatments for infertility associated with endometriosis. In vitro fertilization (IVF) procedures often work to improve fertility in women with the condition. Hormone treatments and surgery offer other infertility treatment options.

- **Dysmenorrhea** refers to painful periods, including severe menstrual cramps. The condition is usually not serious, although infection, endometriosis, or ovarian cysts can sometimes cause it.

Using heating pads or taking a warm bath can sometimes ease painful periods. Over-the-counter pain relievers can also help with the pain. Your health care provider might recommend different methods of birth control including pills or shots to make periods less painful.

Nearly every woman will experience one or more of these menstrual irregularities at some time in her life.

Call FVRM at 920-560-5585 or your personal primary care physician with questions or for the most appropriate treatment option for your situation.