

Do you hate that “time of the month”?

You’re not alone, many women throughout the world suffer from pain when they are about to have, or are having, their period, this is known as, “dysmenorrhoea”: pain, cramps, bloating, mood swings... These are some of the effects caused by the hormonal changes which occur in our body during the menstrual cycle.

Understanding your menstrual cycle

Every month the body prepares for a possible pregnancy. Your ovaries release an egg, a process known as ovulation. During the days prior to this, the lining of the uterus, or endometrium, starts to thicken with an increase in blood and tissue. If the egg is fertilised it embeds in this wall where it starts, little by little, to develop into an embryo. But if the egg is not fertilised, the thickened wall - and the unfertilised egg - are expelled by the body through the vagina. This process is your period.

How do I deal with the pain?

Although there are natural remedies which can partially help with the pain, in many cases medication is required. There are two large drug groups indicated in the treatment of dysmenorrhoea:

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs or NSAIDs: the most commonly used being ibuprofen, diclofenac or naproxen.
- Contraception: combined contraceptives (pill, ring or patch) are those usually prescribed, they contain an oestrogen - normally ethinylestradiol and a progestogen - levonorgestrel, drospirenone or norethisterone. Contraceptives improve the pain in around 90% of women.

Why is such a gentle process so painful?

Whilst the endometrium is being expelled, the uterine muscles contract to push the excess blood and tissue outside the body.

During this process the muscles contract and relax which affects the blood vessels of the wall of the uterus. This limits the flow of oxygen and blood in the uterus and can cause pain. The body also produces prostaglandins to help the uterus expel the endometrium, this increases the pain. However it is also believed that this affects the way pain is perceived by the brain, so is therefore vary variable between one woman and another.

It is normal to feel pain during a period, but possibly up to a third of women suffer pain which prevents them from continuing with their normal life during this time. Whilst for some women menstruation passes almost unnoticed, for others it is torture every month!

If you undergo these changes in the days or weeks before your period you could be suffering from premenstrual syndrome (PMS).



“My name is **Olivia**, I’m 35 and suffer from strong **#MenstrualPain**.”

You should know:

- Paracetamol is not an effective treatment for symptoms of primary dysmenorrhoea.
- Local heat applied above the pubic zone can help to ease the pain.
- Physical exercise helps the body to physiologically increase production of endorphins and to reduce the production of prostaglandins, therefore reducing the symptoms of dysmenorrhoea.
- Don’t forget to have regular check-ups both for peace of mind and to detect possible complications.