

Amenorrhea (Missed Period)

What is amenorrhea?

Amenorrhea is when a woman does not have her periods. There are two kinds of amenorrhea. The first kind is when you haven't had your period at all by the time you are 16 years old. The second kind is when you are used to having periods and you stop having them for 3 months in a row or longer.

What is the cause?

If you have never had a period: If you've never had periods, you may have late puberty. Most of the time, this happens for no reason. It's just late and you don't have to worry about it. Sometimes there may be a problem with your uterus, vagina, ovaries, or certain glands in your body. A problem with any of these body parts may keep you from having a period. It's a good idea to get a checkup. Your health care provider can make sure you do not have any of these problems.

If you've had periods before: A missed period may be caused by pregnancy, breast-feeding, or birth control pills. Your periods could have stopped for many other reasons. It may have to do with your emotions. You may:

- live with a lot of stress
- be sad or depressed
- take medicine, which might affect your periods, for nervousness or depression.

You may have a problem with your glands. You may:

- have a tumor in the brain, an ovary, or other glands
- have a cyst in an ovary
- have a problem with your thyroid
- make too much prolactin (a hormone).

You may have other health problems. You might:

- have a chronic illness
- have a problem with your uterus
- have had chemotherapy or radiation therapy.

And finally you may:

- not get enough to eat
- exercise every day for hours at a time
- have been or are a heavy smoker
- have lost or gained weight suddenly.

After a certain age, usually after 40, your periods will permanently stop. This is called menopause. Your periods will also stop if your uterus is taken out by surgery.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms you have will depend on why your period has stopped.

How is it diagnosed?

When you don't have your periods, most of the time it does not mean you have a serious disease. But it's not always easy to figure out why they have stopped. Work with your health care provider. Do what he or she advises. You will need to:

- tell your provider your medical history
- get a pelvic exam
- have blood tests, x-rays, scans, or other tests as needed.

How is it treated?

Your treatment depends on what is causing the problem. You may not even need treatment. Or:

- You may just need to eat and exercise in a different way.
- You may need to learn to manage stress at work, home, or school.
- You may need to take a hormone.

Your health care provider will talk to you about what treatment will be best for you.

When will my periods come back?

If you have no periods because you have had your uterus taken out or because of menopause, your periods will never come back. If you have just stopped taking birth control pills, shots, or implants, your periods may come back in a few weeks. It could take as long as a year or more. If you've been sick or under a lot of stress, most likely your periods will start back after a time. In some cases there is no treatment that will help.

How can I take care of myself?

If you miss more than 1 period, see your health care provider. Tell your provider about any medicines you are taking.

If your periods don't come every month, keep a record of them. Write down:

- the dates that they start
- how long they last
- how heavy the flow is
- problems you may have with them.

If you have no periods at all, try to remember and write down:

- when you had your last period
- how long it lasted
- how heavy or light the flow was.

Try to find out if any woman in your family has had a problem similar to yours. Follow your health care provider's advice.

What can be done to help prevent missing a period?

To keep your periods normal, it is important to stay healthy:

- Eat and exercise to keep a healthy weight.
- Don't use alcohol or street drugs. Medicines like sleeping pills or herbs can also make your periods stop.
- Don't smoke.
- Get the help you need to lower stress and problems in your life. Talk to your friends, family, or a counselor for support.
- Try to balance your work, play, and rest.

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