

# *Menstruation*

***Menstruation is a woman's menstrual period (also called menses). Blood and tissue from the inside of the uterus flow from the uterus through the small opening in the cervix, and pass out of the body through the vagina. Most menstrual periods last from three to five days.***

## **What is the Menstrual Cycle?**

The cycle starts on the first day of the period. The average menstrual cycle is 28 days long. However, a cycle can range from 23 to 35 days. The parts of the body involved include the brain, pituitary gland, uterus and cervix, ovaries, fallopian tubes, and vagina. The ovaries make two important female hormones, estrogen and progesterone. Other hormones involved in the menstrual cycle include follicle-stimulating hormone and luteinizing hormone, made by the pituitary gland.

In the first half of the menstrual cycle, levels of estrogen rise and make the lining of the uterus grow and thicken. In response to the follicle-stimulating hormone, an egg in one of the ovaries starts to mature. On day 14, of an average 28-day cycle, in response to a surge of luteinizing hormone, the egg leaves the ovary. In the second half of the menstrual cycle, the egg begins to travel through the fallopian tube to the uterus. Progesterone levels rise and help prepare the uterine lining for pregnancy. If the egg becomes fertilized by a sperm cell and attaches itself to the uterine wall, the woman becomes pregnant. If the egg is not fertilized, it either dissolves or is absorbed by the body. If pregnancy does not occur, estrogen and progesterone levels drop, and the thickened lining of the uterus is shed during the menstrual period.

## **At What Age Do Girls Get Their First Periods?**

A girl can begin menstruating between the ages of 8 and 16, but the average age is 12. Menstruation will not occur until the reproductive system has matured.

## **How Long Does a Woman Have Periods?**

Women continue menstruating until menopause – when hormones are no longer produced and there is no longer ovulation.

***This information is general. If your doctor tells you something different, follow his or her instructions.***

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