

"WHY AREN'T MY PERIODS MORE REGULAR?"

I am 32 years of age and my periods haven't been regular since I started menstruating, aged 13. Up until the age of 25 they could be anything from six weeks to six months apart - the last couple of years they've occurred a bit more frequently, but could still be anything from four to seven weeks apart. When they come, they tend to be quite heavy and prolonged. I've never spoken to my doctor about this. Should I?

Stephanie Driver advises:

Irregular periods usually indicate your cycle has become imbalanced and may suggest a hormonal disruption. Menstrual cycles can range from 23-35 days, but as long as they are consistently this length it usually means there is no problem. Erratic, heavy periods may indicate further problems like stress, polycystic ovarian syndrome, fibroids or even endometriosis. I would suggest consulting your GP to rule out any of these first.

The natural approach to this problem is designed to encourage your own body's re-establishment of regular ovulation and to rebalance the hormones. The herb chaste tree, also known as vitex agnus castus, stimulates and normalises the function of the pituitary gland, which in turn helps to balance output from the ovaries and stimulates ovulation. In turn, it can help rebalance your irregular cycle (you cannot take this herb if you are on the pill or fertility drugs). Try it for three months continuously, and then break from it.

Dong quai, blue cohosh and lady's mantle can also be used to regulate the cycle and reduce heavy menstruation. A qualified herbalist can make these up for you.

B-complex vitamins with approximately 100mg of each B vitamin are essential if you are stressed. Deficiencies can also can disrupt the hormone cycle.

Magnesium is also required for hormone conversions and stress. Take 500mg daily to help relieve any deficiencies.

"SHOULD I BE TAKING AN IRON SUPPLEMENT?"

My doctor tells me I'm anaemic and has prescribed iron tablets. However, I don't much like taking them because they make me very constipated and I've heard they can oxidise in the body, causing disease. Is this really the case? I don't eat red meat, but I do try to get a good balance in my diet. How else can I boost my iron stores and avoid the need for supplementation. I'm 35 and had a baby 14 months ago.

Dr Shamim Daya advises:

If you have been found to be anaemic from a blood test showing you to have low haemoglobin, then your iron levels have probably been falling for quite some time before

that. As women, due to having monthly menstruation, we do lose a fair bit of blood over the course of time. Not eating red meat makes it difficult to replenish sufficient iron from your diet. There are several types of iron that do not cause constipation. As the iron supplementation is only for a limited time it is worth persevering with or trying another brand. There are a couple of liquid irons, Spatone Iron and Ionic Iron, which are gentler on the system. Often, iron may require vitamin C for better absorption. It may also be worthwhile taking a vitamin B complex with it. As with all supplementation, excessive amounts may cause potential harm to the body, but equally a deficiency can also be a problem. It is not uncommon for an iron deficiency to cause estrogen dominance and interfere with thyroid function, for example. It is also helpful to avoid wheat as this can sometimes interfere with iron absorption as well as that of other minerals. Finally, there are certain Chinese herbs that can help build iron stores, correcting blood and chi deficiency states.

Natural cures for childhood ills

My 11-month old daughter certainly gets her fair share of colds, feverish nights and grisly days (teething is usually to blame). The usual advice is to dose her up with Calpol, but I'm not happy about always doing this. Are there any natural approaches for dealing with these common childhood ills?

Katrin Hempel advises:

Babies commonly suffer from infections and fevers as their immune system and temperature regulation isn't fully developed. A healthy gut flora is an essential part of a well functioning immune system, and an imbalance can lead to a lowered threshold to diseases. The first step to improving your baby's health is supplementation with a good quality probiotic.

You can also add a minimum of 250mg a day of buffered vitamin C to her food to improve her immunity and help prevent further infections. The dose can be increased to 500mg/day, but if she shows the first signs of diarrhoea stop and reduce the dose slightly. You can start supplementing with omega 3 fish oil to strengthen the immune system when your baby is about one year old. The dose is about 3mls a day, which can be increased when the child gets older.

Herbal remedies are excellent for use in babies and children. They are safe, without any side effects, and are very effective in the treatment of underlying causes and cure. Herbs like elderflower, ground ivy, thymus, licorice and echinacea are fantastic in the treatment of upper respiratory infections, fevers and coughs. They can be administered as an herbal tincture or as a tea in a bottle.

Homeopathic remedies work fast and babies are usually very responsive to the treatment. Most common remedies for children include aconite, belladonna, calc. carb.,

MEET THE PANEL

DEE ATKINSON



has been a practising medical herbalist since 1988 and now runs Napiers herbal health care in Edinburgh (the UK's largest herbal house), where she specialises in skin problems, arthritis and joint problems. She writes regular articles and columns in newspapers and magazines and has made TV and radio appearances.

STELLA NEW



RSHom MBANT is a registered homeopath and nutritional therapist based in West Sussex, and technical consultant for Xynergy Health Products. Prior to her training she spent many years as an expedition leader, taking groups into some of the most challenging parts of the world, where she was inspired by the use of natural remedies for treating all manner of ailments. Email info@stellanew.co.uk

STEPHANIE DRIVER



studied for her Bachelor of Science and Naturopathy in Perth, Western Australia. She has worked in two naturopathic clinics near Perth for four years, specialising in nutrition and herbal medicine. She started practice as a senior naturopath at Apotheke 20-20 & Jurlique Day Spa in Chiswick, West London in 2004. Contact Apotheke 20-20 & Jurlique Day Spa on 020 8995 2293 or visit apotheke20-20.co.uk

DR SHAMIM DAYA



BM DRCOG has 25 years clinical experience as a GP and holistic practitioner, focusing on women's health. She combines nutrition, herbal medicine and advanced biochemical testing to reach the source of persisting symptoms. She also specialises in alternative breast screening using thermal imaging. Contact The Wholistic Medical Centre on 020 7580 7537 or go to www.wholisticmedical.co.uk

KATRIN HEMPEL



is an Australian trained naturopath who provides naturopathic treatment combined with nutritional/dietary advice and homeopathy at Galen Naturopathic Centre (Tel: 020 8332 7711). Her special interest is gut healing and repair and its effect on disorders of the mental field and autism spectrum. She also specialises in male health and problems surrounding performance, male andropause and the special needs and demands on men in our fast-moving society.

arsenicum album, pulsatilla and chamomilla. The latter is also an excellent remedy for teething problems. Please stick to the recommended doses according to your baby's age when using nutritional supplements and herbal preparations, and consult a reputable naturopathic practitioner.