Menstrual Cycle and PMS

Menstrual Cycle

In the beginning of the menstrual cycle, levels of estrogen rise, causing the lining of the uterus to grow and get thicker. An egg starts to mature in one of the ovaries. Around the middle of the cycle, the egg leaves the ovary, a process called ovulation. The egg begins to travel down the fallopian tubes to the uterus. If the egg becomes fertilized by a sperm cell and attaches to the uterus, the woman becomes pregnant. If not, the uterus does not need the extra thick lining and it begins to shed. This shedding of the uterine lining through the vagina is menstruation. The average menstrual cycle is 28 days from the start of one to the start of the next.

Menstrual Cramps

Before and during the menstrual cycle, most women experience cramping. Cramping occurs most often in young women who have just begun their menstrual cycles and often becomes less severe after a woman has given birth or when she reaches her mid-twenties. Other causes of cramping could be fibroid tumors, pelvic adhesions, and ovarian cysts or by the use of an intrauterine device (IUD) for birth control. Menstrual cramps are thought to be related to a hormone-like naturally occurring substance called prostaglandins which cause the uterus to contract. If a woman does not ovulate it is unlikely that she will encounter cramps during her period, for this reason physicians often prescribe oral contraceptives to ease painful periods. However, you should be aware that birth control pills cause abnormal bleeding in some women.

Premenstrual Sydrom (PMS)

Premenstrual syndrome is a group of symptoms linked to the menstrual cycle. PMS symptoms occur 1 to 2 weeks before your period starts and typically go away after you start bleeding. The following are symptoms of PMS and, while they can be bothersome, they are normal and can usually be resolved with the methods noted on the left.

- Acne
- Swollen or tender breasts
- Trouble sleeping
- Upset stomach, bloating, constipation, or diarrhea
- Joint or muscle pain
- Trouble with concentration or memory
- Irritability, tension, mood swings, or crying spells
- Anxiety or depression

For more information, visit http://womenshealth.about.com or http://www.womenshealth.gov.