

FOR EACH OF US IT'S DIFFERENT

SPEAK went out and spoke to women about their periods. Some women told of the pain they have and how they cope with it, others spoke of irregular periods and heavy bleeding. Some women spoke of the tension and irritation they feel just before they get their periods. Many women spoke of not having any problems at all.

There are many reasons why the kind of period a woman has can be so different for each woman. Our lives are different and the things that happen in our lives affect our periods. Feelings - like being worried, depressed, or excited can cause our periods to be late, or to even stop for a while. What we eat, the amount of work we do, and how much sleep we get can cause a change in our periods. Other things, like age, the type of contraception we use, or having a sickness or disease can also make a change in our periods.

In this SPEAK we will talk about some of these things. We will also share the ways in which women said they cope with their period pains.

AGE

"I am now 45 years old and yet my periods have become very irregular - this never used to happen. Sometimes I find it much heavier than before."



Some young women have irregular periods and pain until their bodies have adjusted to having periods. Women between the ages of 40 and 50 may also have very irregular periods and heavy bleeding. This happens because they are approaching their 'change of life'. It may be useful to see a doctor if bleeding becomes very heavy and there is a lot of discomfort.

CONTRACEPTIVES

Some contraceptives interfere with our periods. Many women spoke of the worry they felt about this.

The Pill

"As soon as I started using the pill I noticed that my period became much shorter, with less blood, and no period pains."

The pill does cause this to happen. But some women do still experience bad period cramps while using the pill.

The Loop (IUCD)

The loop can also cause changes to periods. The flow of blood can be heavier, periods may be irregular and period pains are worse, often with backache. People who suffer from bad period

pains should not use the loop because it makes the pain worse. The pain is made worse by the loop because the uterus squeezes against it when it forces the menstrual blood out.



The Injection (Depo Provera)

The injection can cause irregular bleeding or periods to stop completely. Sometimes it is also difficult to become pregnant after using the injection. Many women worry about having no periods while using the injection. One woman said to us: "I am worried about this blood that does not come out each month. Where does it go?"

In fact, what happens is that the injection stops the egg from being formed. Also, the lining of the uterus does not develop so that there is no blood to come out.

PREGNANCY

If your periods stop, and if you have had sex with a man during your fertile time without either of you using a contraceptive, then there is a good chance that you are pregnant. To check this you can have a pregnancy test. Some chemists sell do-it-yourself pregnancy tests. It is possible for a young girl to become pregnant without ever having had a period. It can happen, although not common, that you still get periods after becoming pregnant. A woman told us her story about this!

"I didn't know I was pregnant because my periods carried on for

3 months just like usual. Only later did I discover that I was pregnant!"

MISCARRIAGE

If you have heavy bleeding after missing a period, it may be caused by a miscarriage. It is quite common for women to have miscarriages very early in pregnancy - before they even know they are pregnant. If your bleeding is very heavy and you have big clots of blood - the size of a 1 cent piece or bigger - you should see a doctor.

DISEASE

You may suddenly stop having periods, and you are not pregnant, or if you start bleeding very heavily with every period and have a lot of pain, or maybe your periods become very irregular. Some diseases can cause these types of changes. It is important to see a doctor so that she can find out what is causing the change in your periods and treat if necessary.

COPING WITH PERIOD PAINS

Period pains are believed to be caused by the uterus muscles squeezing the blood from the walls of the uterus. But it is not understood why this should be painful to some women and not to others. Most of the women SPEAK spoke to did not get bad period pains. Those who do get period pains told us how they suffer and how they've learnt to cope.

"I get terrible pain when I have my period. The pain usually wakes me up early in the morning and I know my period has come.

I hate to take tablets because I fear side effects. I put a hot water bottle on my stomach. It helps with the pain and I at least get back to sleep again. But I usually feel very tired and drained the next day."

"I have found that exercise helps me when I have bad pain. I don't usually feel like exercising, but when I do it helps to relax the muscles in my stomach and the pain is relieved. Rubbing my stomach also helps. Asking someone to rub the lower part of my back helps a lot as well."

"I used to get very depressed before my periods and used to feel like crying at anything. My breasts also got very full and sore and my body felt bloated. A friend told me to take

calcium tablets. I now take calcium tablets a few days before my period starts and during my period. It has really helped me."

"I get terrible pain but my mother always told me nothing helps.

So I just roll about on my stomach! That helps!"

There are a number of home remedies which many women use to lessen the discomfort of periods. Some women find that changing their diet helps a bit - like drinking less tea and

coffee and eating less salt and flour and other refined foods. Others take vitamin C and calcium tablets which seem to lessen menstrual tension. Massage can help. Although when we are in pain we do not feel like doing anything, exercise and keeping active can help.

We should avoid taking a lot of drugs to help us cope with the pain and tension as drugs can cause a lot of problems and harm to our bodies. Many of the pain killers which say they help period pains do not really help. If your pain is really bad and you want to take pain killers you should talk to a doctor about the best pain killers for period pain.

When something unusual happens to your period pattern you should try and get a doctor's advice. Some doctors prescribe just anything - like the contraceptive pill - to correct problems with periods without finding the cause of the problems properly. Knowing about our bodies helps us to make decisions about ourselves and to demand proper treatment from doctors and hospitals.

There are books that have good information about women's health. These are often written by women, with women's interests at heart. If you would like to find out more about such books, you can write to SPEAK Collective, Office 14, The Ecumenical Centre, 20 St Andrew's Street, Durban.

