

Medical guidance notes and information

Painful Periods - Dysmenorrhoea

General Facts

- Most women have some pain during periods. 9 in 10 women are able to continue with their day-to-day activities.
- Common in teenagers and young adults. Periods tend to become less painful the older you become.
- There are two types of painful periods:
 - Primary dysmenorrhoea; the cause is unclear and the uterus is normal. Contractions and pains are thought to be induced by prostaglandins which develop during menstruation.
 - Secondary Dysmenorrhoea: pain due to an underlying cause such as pelvic inflammatory disease, fibroids, endometriosis, adhesions, adenomyosis, uterine displacement, or a retroverted uterus.
- Endometriosis is the most common cause of secondary dysmenorrhoea.

Symptoms

- The main symptom is crampy pain in the lower abdomen related to when the bleeding starts but can occur up to the day before.
- It can spread to the lower back and to the top of legs.
- It usually lasts 12-24 hours, but can last up to 2-3 days.
- Pain can vary during each period. Some periods may not be as bad as others.
- Pain tends to lessen the older women get and after having a baby.
- A change in usual pattern of pain or associated symptoms such as irregular periods, bleeding between periods, vaginal discharge or pain during sex can indicate that there may be an underlying cause.

Treatment

- Exercise – getting active is a good way to ease pain. Try gentle swimming, walking or cycling.
- Paracetamol usually helps if the pain is mild and Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen and naproxen, are very effective.
- Oral and intra-uterine contraceptive devices are also effective therapies.
- TENS – trans-cutaneous electronic nerve stimulation can be used to reduce pain. They are small electrodes placed on the abdomen to stimulate nerves in the pelvic area that interfere with pain signals.
- The most effective treatment of secondary dysmenorrhoea is the identification and treatment of the underlying cause of the pain

G1203 A1 10/10/2011

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Fitness for Work

- It is normal for women to experience a heavy menstrual period or cramps from time to time and we would expect women to continue working during this.
- Consider the medication they are taking – will it restrict them?
- If the employee experiences frequent severe symptoms they should seek medical advice from their GP.
- If symptoms are severe enough that an employee does not feel able to work in any capacity during each period, a referral to OH for advice may be beneficial

Revised February 2011 JC

G1203 A1 10/10/2011