SYMPTOM

Missed period

A missed period means expected menstrual bleeding has not started on time.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Your expected menstrual bleeding does not start

WHERE IT IS FELT
Menstrual bleeding from the vagina is absent

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Pregnancy, stress or illness, hormonal contraception

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Severe one-sided pelvic pain, fainting, or heavy bleeding with possible pregnancy

USUALLY LASTS
One cycle or longer, depending on the cause

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Three missed periods, or sooner with other symptoms

Overview

A missed period means your menstrual bleeding has not started when expected. The medical term for periods that stop is amenorrhea .

Menstrual cycles do not always follow an exact schedule. A period may occasionally be late because ovulation-the release of an egg-happened later than usual. However, pregnancy is an important possibility whenever sperm could have entered the vagina, even if you used contraception.

Periods may also stop because of hormonal contraception, breastfeeding, stress, illness, changes in weight or exercise, or a health condition. A missed period alone cannot show which cause applies to you.

If your periods have not started at all by age 15, arrange a medical appointment. This is different from missing a period after having regular cycles, but it also deserves assessment.

What it may feel or look like

The main sign is that bleeding does not begin around the expected time. You may have no

other symptoms.

Depending on the cause, you might also notice:

These symptoms can have several explanations. They do not confirm pregnancy or any other condition.

- Breast tenderness, nausea, tiredness, or needing to urinate more often
- Cramps, bloating, or mood changes without bleeding
- Acne or increased facial or body hair
- Hot flushes, night sweats, or vaginal dryness
- Changes in weight, appetite, exercise, sleep, or stress
- Milky fluid from the nipples when you are not breastfeeding
- Headaches, vision changes, pelvic pain, or unusual vaginal discharge

Common causes

Pregnancy is a common reason for a missed period. No contraceptive method prevents every pregnancy. Testing is appropriate if pregnancy is possible, including after missed contraceptive pills or problems with condoms.

Normal changes in cycle timing can make a period late. Stress, disrupted sleep, travel, a recent infection, or another short-term illness can delay ovulation.

Hormonal contraception may make bleeding lighter, irregular, or absent. This can happen with some pills, injections, implants, and hormonal intrauterine devices. Whether missing bleeding is expected depends on the method and how you use it.

Other common life-related causes include breastfeeding, substantial weight loss or gain, not eating enough, and intense exercise. During perimenopause-the years leading up to menopause-periods often become less predictable before stopping.

Less common causes include polycystic ovary syndrome, known as PCOS; thyroid conditions; high levels of the hormone prolactin; reduced ovarian function before the usual age of menopause; and problems affecting hormone signals from the brain. Some medicines and long-term health conditions can also affect periods.

When to seek medical care

Seek emergency help if you may be pregnant and develop severe or worsening lower

abdominal pain, especially on one side, shoulder-tip pain, marked dizziness, fainting, or heavy bleeding. These can be signs of an ectopic pregnancy, in which a pregnancy develops outside the uterus, or another urgent condition. Do not wait for a routine appointment.

Get same-day medical advice if pregnancy is possible and you have pelvic pain or vaginal bleeding, even if the pain is not severe or a home test is negative.

Arrange routine care if:

A positive pregnancy test without urgent symptoms usually calls for routine contact with a pregnancy care service or clinician to discuss next steps.

- You have missed three periods in a row and are not pregnant
- Your periods repeatedly become much less regular
- You have pelvic pain, nipple discharge, headaches, vision changes, hot flushes, or increased facial hair
- Weight, eating, or exercise changes may be affecting your cycle
- Your periods have not started by age 15

How the cause is found

A home pregnancy test is usually the first step when pregnancy is possible. If the result is negative but your period still does not start, repeat testing after a few days or contact a healthcare professional. Testing too early can miss a pregnancy.

At an appointment, you may be asked about your usual cycle, sexual activity, contraception, medicines, stress, exercise, eating patterns, weight changes, and other symptoms. You can choose whether to have a support person present.

Tests depend on your situation. They may include a pregnancy test and blood tests for thyroid function, prolactin, or hormones involved in ovulation. An ultrasound may be used to examine the uterus and ovaries. A pelvic examination is not always needed.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on why the period is missing. A single late period without concerning symptoms may only need monitoring.

If pregnancy is possible, take a pregnancy test and avoid assuming that contraception or lack of symptoms rules it out. Keep a record of bleeding dates, test results, pain, medicines, and

other changes. This can make a medical assessment more useful.

Try to eat enough to support your usual activity. If intense exercise, restrictive eating, or weight change may be involved, seek professional support rather than making abrupt changes alone.

Do not start, stop, or double hormonal medicines to trigger bleeding unless a clinician has advised it. Treatment for an underlying cause may involve adjusting contraception, addressing a thyroid or hormone problem, supporting nutrition, or managing PCOS. Prolonged low estrogen levels can affect bone health, so repeatedly absent periods should not simply be ignored.

What to expect

An isolated missed period often ends when bleeding begins later in the cycle. Cycles affected by stress or a short illness may settle once the trigger improves.

If hormonal contraception is responsible, bleeding may remain light or absent while you use that method. Your clinician or the method's prescribing information can help clarify what is expected.

When periods remain absent, the next steps depend on test results and your goals, including whether you want to prevent or plan a pregnancy. Follow-up may be needed to check whether cycles return and whether treatment is helping.

Common questions

Can I be pregnant without other symptoms?

Yes. Early pregnancy may cause no noticeable symptoms apart from a missed period. A test is more reliable than symptoms.

Can stress really stop a period?

Yes. Stress can affect the brain signals that control ovulation. However, pregnancy and other causes still need consideration.

Is it harmful not to bleed while using contraception?

With some hormonal methods, absent bleeding is an expected effect and does not mean blood is building up. Check the instructions for your method and test for pregnancy if its use was interrupted or incorrect.

What if my test is negative?

The test may have been taken too early, or the missed period may have another cause. Repeat it after a few days if pregnancy remains possible. Arrange an appointment if periods stay absent or other symptoms develop.

Does a missed period mean menopause?

Not by itself. Menopause is identified after 12 months without a period when there is no other cause. Pregnancy remains possible during perimenopause while ovulation still occurs.

Sources

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