

Know 'Your Normal' - Track Your Monthly Menstrual Cycle

Ladies, some changes in your period are normal. But what's typical for you may not be typical for someone else.

Track your monthly menstrual cycle to help you understand 'your normal.' Then, you can more easily recognize how your body is changing — and discuss your options with your doctor.

My cycle is irregular. What now?

When you notice that certain aspects of your cycle are irregular, it's time to check-in with your doctor. "Irregular can mean changes in flow, pain, or time," says Dr. Karla Maguire, obstetrician and gynecologist at the University of Miami Health System. "It's good to watch it for 2-3 months, unless it's something severe."

Collecting this information means that you have more data to give your doctor. Your doctor is then able to get a better idea of how irregular your period or cycle is and provide a recommendation for treatment.

"Some people don't realize that it's okay to vary a couple of days," Dr. Maguire said. "It doesn't have to be the exact date each month."

Think big picture. Your period is only one aspect of your monthly cycle.

"Usually, day one is the first day you have a flow," said Dr. Maguire. To determine how long your cycle is, "you count from day one until the first day you have another

flow. In most women, that's somewhere between 25 and 35 days."

In a typical month, you'll take note of things like mood, energy level, cravings, ovulation, and even intimacy. Whether you use an app or a journal, tracking these occurrences will give you the best idea of what you should expect.



Track your monthly menstrual cycle with medically accurate apps

If you don't want to keep handwritten notes, there are apps available on your cell phone. But, according to one study, only a handful are medically accurate.

The study started its search with 1,116 apps and narrowed down the list to 20 accurate apps based on cost, language, whether or not it tracked menstrual cycles and any duplicate apps.

Below is the list of medically accurate apps. Note: this study is from 2016 and that the reviewed apps likely have updated versions.

- Clue
- Glow
- Pink Pad Period & Fertility Tracker Pro
- GP Apps; Period Tracker, Free Menstrual Calendar
- iPeriod Period Tracker Free; LoveCycles Menstrual, Ovulation & Period

Tracker; Mom and Baby to Be

- Groove; Lily; Menstrual Calendar; Period Tracker
- Day After; MonthPal (now known as “Touchable Period Tracker”)
- Menstruation & ovulation (now known as “Menstrual Period Tracker”)
- FemCal Lite; The Flow
- It’s a Girl Thing
- Fertility Cycle
- Free Girl Cal

The study reports, “of the 20 accurate, free apps, 80% contained information for conception and 50% for contraception. Common features and functionality included password protection (55%); no requirement for Internet connectivity (80%); no advertisements (65%); in-application technical support (70%); medical disclaimers (65%); health education (55%); tracking of menstrual flow (70%), symptoms (70%), and intercourse (75%); alerts for next menses (65%) and fertility (55%); and cycle length information (75%). Forty percent were available for Android. Usefulness for fertility medications (15%), professional involvement (5%), and cited literature (5%) were rare.”

NOTE: Any information contained in menstrual cycle tracking apps should never take the place of medical advice.

Remember, birth control contraceptives will impact your cycle

In a few cases, women might experience a very light period or no period at all.

“One reason it might be light is just it’s always been light,” said Dr. Maguire. “And as we get closer to menopause, sometimes our periods change.”

Women who have intrauterine devices or use other contraceptives are another example of those who may have a light period or no period at all. “If you’re not getting a period, you should definitely let your doctor know. It’s not normal to be period-free when you’re not on a birth control method that stops your periods.”

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