

## **DYSMENORRHEA**

### **WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW:**

- Dysmenorrhea (dis-men-uh-ree-uh) is dull or sharp pain in the lower abdomen (belly) during your monthly period. They are also called menstrual (men-strull) cramps. During menstruation, the uterus contracts (tightens) to push blood out of the uterus (womb). Very strong contractions can cause pain and cramping. You may also have pain when the cervix (bottom part of the uterus) opens to pass blood clots. The pain sometimes spreads to the back and legs. You may also have nausea (upset stomach), vomiting (throwing up), or diarrhea with your cramps. Or, you may feel tired and irritable.
- The cramps usually go away 1 to 2 days after the start of your period. Cramps during your period often become less painful as you get older. You may need to have a pelvic exam (an "internal") if you are having bad pain. A pelvic exam is done to check your female organs for problems. There is usually no way to keep from getting cramps but they can be treated. If the cramps are new or worse than before, they may be caused by an infection or tumor. In these cases, the cause of the pain must be treated.

### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

- Your medicines are: .
  - Keep a written list of what medicines you take and when and why you take them. Bring the list of your medicines or the pill bottles when you see your caregivers. Learn why you take each medicine. Ask your caregiver for information about your medicines. Do not take any medicines without first talking to caregivers.
  - Always take your medicine as directed by caregivers. Call your caregiver if you think your medicines are not helping or if you feel you are having side effects. Do not quit taking it until you discuss it with your caregiver. If you are taking antibiotics (an-ti-bi-ah-tiks), take them until they are all gone even if you feel better.
  - If you are taking medicine that makes you drowsy, do not drive or use heavy equipment.
  - You may use ibuprofen (i-bew-pro-fin), acetaminophen (uh-c-tuh-min-o-fin), or other medicine for menstrual cramps that you can buy without a prescription. These may be bought as over-the-counter medicine at grocery stores and drug stores. Do not take ibuprofen if you are allergic to aspirin, have ulcers, or kidney disease.
- You may use heat to lessen the pain and cramps. Use a heating pad (turned on low), a hot water bottle, or sit in a warm water bath. Place the heating pad or water bottle on the painful part of your lower abdomen (belly) or back. Do this for 15 to 20 minutes out of every hour as long as you need it. Do not sleep on the heating pad or hot water bottle.
- Stay as active as possible. Getting regular exercise often helps lessen the pain. You do **not** need to stay in bed.
- Stress may make menstrual cramps worse. Since it is hard to avoid stress, learn to control it. Learn new ways to relax (deep breathing, meditation, relaxing muscles, music, or biofeedback). Talk to someone about things that upset you.

**CALL**  **IF:**

- Your pain has not improved with medication.
- Your pain lasts more than 3 days.
- You have pain when urinating or having a BM.
- You feel pain on only one side of your abdomen (belly) and have a temperature over  F (  C).
- You have problems after taking medicine, such as a rash, itching, or swelling.

**SEEK CARE IMMEDIATELY IF:**

- Your pain is so bad that you can not walk.
- You get a temperature over  F (  C), start vomiting or have diarrhea.
- You get a rash, feel dizzy, or have muscle aches during your menstrual period.
- You have trouble breathing after you take your medicine.