

Menstrual Disorders

Menstrual disorders are a common problem during adolescence. These disorders may cause significant anxiety for patients and their families. Physical and psychological factors contribute to the problem. The disorders of menstruation may be classified into Amenorrhea (lack of bleeding), Oligomenorrhea (too little bleeding), Dysmenorrhea (painful menstruation) and Menorrhagia (excessive bleeding)

Causes

Sudden weight loss or gain, intense exercise, stress, hyperthyroidism, fibroids, and pelvic inflammatory disease are some of the causes of improper and irregular menstruation.

Menstrual disorders, characterized by painful cramps and irregularity, are related to aggravation of all three *doshas*. The main *dosha* involved is *Vata*. The lower pelvis is the seat of *Apana vata*, which is responsible for elimination of the menstrual blood, stool, urine and reproductive fluids. At the commencement of menstruation, *Apana vata* is increased. The symptoms of aggravated *Apana vata* are disturbed digestion, constipation or diarrhea, flatulence and vomiting, cramps in the legs, pain in the lower pelvis and general weakness.

Ayurveda recommends that the physician should aim to diagnose the root cause of the dysfunction, than merely using symptomatic treatments.

Dysmenorrhea

It is characterized by severe, painful cramps during menstruation that may prevent the patient from continuing with daily activities during her menstrual period. These cramps may be accompanied by lower backache, pain in the inner thighs, and fluctuating moods.

Ayurveda considers this disorder as a dysfunction in apana vata in its normal downward movement. Causative factors include constipation and hormonal imbalance due to intake of wrong diet, stressful life style and nervous exhaustion.

Advice and Precautions

- Avoid fried food, pulses, beans and sour food during menstruation. Avoid foods that aggravate *Vata* or cause constipation. Vegetables including pumpkin, potato, mushroom, cauliflower, peas and eggplant should be excluded from the diet.
- Papaya, cucumber, squash and zucchini are recommended. So are spices such as cumin, asafetida, fenugreek, black pepper, cloves, coriander and mint.
- Regular exercise like walking or mild stretching is good for alleviating cramps. Avoid sleeping during the day.

Treatments and Home remedies

- Massage lower abdomen with warm sesame oil for 10-15 minutes. Follow with hot fomentation. Use a damp towel wrapped around a hot water bottle.
- Eat crushed garlic twice a day. Each dose should include two cloves. You can add them to meals.
- Take 1 tbsp of *Aloe vera* gel mixed with a pinch of black pepper or cinnamon twice a day or until cramps stop.
- A decoction of cumin seeds helps, when taken from the first day of menstruation. Add 1 tablespoon of cumin seeds to 2 cups of water and simmer over moderate heat until the mixture is reduced by half. Sieve, add raw sugar or honey and drink. This is one dose. Two doses daily for three days will relieve symptoms. Continue to take this during successive cycles to reduce the severity of symptoms.
- Infusion of fresh ginger or 1 tsp of dried ginger in 1 cup of water relieves symptoms.
- One tablespoonful of asafetida fried and mixed with fresh goat's milk and honey can be taken three times a day for a month.

• Amenorrhea and Oligomenorrhea

These conditions are indicated by an absence of menstrual flow, and scanty or delayed menstrual flow, respectively. They both denote a devitalized and debilitated condition of the general system.

Advice and Precautions

- The same dietary recommendations as Dysmenorrhea apply.
- Infusion of fresh ginger or 1 tsp of dried ginger in 1 cup of water with sweetener, three times a day after meals treats amenorrhea caused by cold.
- Regularly take half tsp of sesame seeds powder with hot water, twice daily for two days prior to menstruation. A warm hipbath with a handful of bruised seeds is recommended during the same period.

Treatments and Home remedies

- Extract of *Aloe vera* with honey for oral intake.
- Decoction of sesame mixed with jaggery and *Trikatu* (ginger, black pepper and long pepper).

• Menorrhagia

This condition is characterized by excessive menstrual bleeding and as with all the menstrual disorders indicates disruption of vata and build up of toxins within the system. The root causative factor must be diagnosed to achieve complete cure.

Advice and Precautions

- The same dietary recommendations as Dysmenorrhea apply.
- Include cooked banana flower with curd in the meal. Banana flower increases secretion of progesterone and reduces the bleeding.

Treatments and Home remedies

- 1 tsp of the dry fruit of *Zizyphus jujuba* with jaggery stops excessive menstruation.
- Boil 6 grams of coriander seeds in half a liter of water. Reduce to half. Add sweetener and drink when still warm.
- 1 tbsp of asafetida fried and mixed with fresh goat's milk and honey, three times a day, for a month.
- *Bala* (*Sida cordifolia*; Country mallow) root mixed with honey and taken with milk or rice water.
- *Chandana* (Sandalwood) mixed with milk, ghee, sugar and honey.
- Juice of *Udumbara* fruit (fig) taken with honey as part of diet rich in milk.

• Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

Pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS) is a group of symptoms related to the menstrual cycle. PMS symptoms may occur anytime during the week or even a week before your period (menstruation or monthly bleeding) starts and usually go away once it starts. Menopause, when monthly periods stop, brings an end to PMS.

Premenstrual syndrome is characterized by anxiety, sweating, palpitations, dizziness, headaches, cramps, sleeplessness and fatigue. It may also manifest as depression, tearful outbreaks, aggression and confusion. Some women also complain of breast tenderness, sudden weight gains and bloating.

Causes

The causes of PMS are not yet clear. Some women may be more sensitive than others to changing hormone levels during the menstrual cycle. Stress does not seem to cause PMS, but may make it worse. PMS can affect menstruating women of any age.

According to Ayurvedic perspective, the cause of PMS is aggravated *vata dosha*. More specifically *apana vata*, the sub-*dosha* of *vata dosha*, is involved. *Apana vata* resides in the lower pelvic region and is responsible for elimination of menstrual blood, stool, urine and reproductive fluids. *Apana vata* increases at the commencement of menstruation and produces symptoms of disturbed digestion, flatulence, cramping, headaches, tiredness, pain in the thighs and legs, and pain or cramps in the pelvic area and back.

Apana vata eventually causes aggravation of *prana vata*. *Prana vata* is another sub-*dosha* of *vata dosha*. *Prana vata* resides in the head and brain, and is linked to anxiety, mood swings and depression-like problems. Thus, emotional symptoms are also involved during those days.

Advice and Precautions

Avoid eating sour foods, fried foods and beans during menstruation. Also exclude vegetables such as pumpkins, potatoes, mushrooms, cauliflowers, peas and aubergines from your diet. Instead, include papaya, cucumber, squash and zucchini. Food can be garnished with spices such as cumin, asafoetida, fenugreek, black pepper, cloves, coriander and mint.

Although you would be inclined to take complete rest, remaining active and taking regular, but mild exercise is beneficial. Walking is especially good for alleviating cramps. Simple stretching exercises are also very relieving.

Taking purgatives for about 2 days before the scheduled start of menstruation can alleviate disturbed *vata*. Massaging the lower abdomen with warm sesame oil for about 10 - 15 minutes, followed by applications of hot fomentations or hot water bottles soothes cramps.

Treatments and Home Remedies

- Take crushed garlic twice a day; you may eat as many as 2 cloves of garlic for each dose. This may even be added to meals.
- Eat a tablespoon of *Aloe vera* gel mixed with a pinch of black pepper or cinnamon powder, twice a day or till the cramps cease.
- A decoction of cumin seeds can be taken on the first day of menstruation. Add a tablespoon of cumin seeds to 2 cups of water and simmer over moderate heat until the mixture reduces by half. Sieve the decoction and add unrefined sugar or honey. This comprises a single dose, take two such doses each day for three days for relieving symptoms. Taken with each successive cycle, this remedy reduces the severity of symptoms.
- An infusion of fresh ginger or a teaspoon of dried ginger in a cup of water is also very beneficial.