

# Natural Help 4...

# Amenorrhea



## What is Amenorrhea?

**Amenorrhea** is the term used to describe the condition where menstrual periods are absent. When you miss a period, your first thought may be that you are pregnant. However, there are actually **several factors that may cause or contribute to the absence of menstruation**.

Menstruation refers to the shedding of the lining of the uterus (the endometrium) each month, and it is also **commonly known as the menstrual period**.

Menstrual periods usually last for five to seven days. In order for a woman to have regular **menstrual cycles**, her hypothalamus, pituitary gland, ovaries and uterus must be functioning properly. Her **cervix and vagina must also be structured normally** to allow for menstrual blood to pass through.

## Types of Amenorrhea

**Amenorrhea** is classified into two types – primary and secondary **amenorrhea**.

**Primary Amenorrhea** - Primary **amenorrhea** occurs when a woman has not yet had her first menstrual period by the age of 16. This delayed period is usually due to late puberty, most common in teenage girls who are either very thin or very athletic. When young women are underweight, their bodies have yet to experience the normal puberty-related rise in body fat that sparks off the beginning of menstruation. On the other hand, the **delay of menstruation may also be as a result of abnormal female reproductive organs or a genetic disorder** involving the sex chromosomes, such as Turner's syndrome.

**Secondary Amenorrhea** - Secondary **amenorrhea** is a condition in which a woman who previously had normal, regular **menstrual cycles** experiences **irregular or absent periods**.

**Amenorrhea** affects **2% to 5% of all women of childbearing age** in the United States. Secondary **amenorrhea** can affect all women who have begun menstruating. Young women who are involved in sports where intense exercise is required like ballet, long distance running or gymnastics are more likely to be affected with **amenorrhea**.

**Amenorrhea is a symptom in itself**. Depending on the cause of **amenorrhea**, you may experience the absence of periods together with various symptoms of hormone imbalance such as breast milk secretions, headache, **weight gain**, acne, altered sex drive **low libido**, lowering of the voice, excessive hair growth on the face

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and body, and [vision changes](#).

## Diagnosing Amenorrhea

The diagnosis of [amenorrhea](#) is based on your medical history, physical examination, as well as a pelvic examination. Your health practitioner has to rule out other menstrual disorders, medical conditions, as well as medications in order to determine a proper diagnosis of [amenorrhea](#).

Whether you are pregnant or not has to also be determined - a woman has to have **missed at least three consecutive [menstrual cycles](#)** without being pregnant to be classified as having [amenorrhea](#).

A young woman 16 years of age or older who has not yet had her first menstrual period should be evaluated immediately so that an early diagnosis can be made and treatment started. In addition, other tests may be performed to determine the underlying cause of the absence of periods.

## Tests for Amenorrhea

**Blood and urine tests** are able to detect the imbalances of female hormones caused by problems with the ovaries or pituitary gland. Additional tests may also be performed to check levels of thyroid and adrenal hormones.

**Pelvic ultrasound** uses sound waves to detect problems or abnormalities in the structure of your uterus and ovaries.

**A progesterone challenge test** is done to evaluate your estrogen status. You may be treated with the hormone progesterone to see whether this brings about a menstrual period.

## What Causes Amenorrhea?

There are several possible causes of primary and secondary [amenorrhea](#), and they include:

### Primary Amenorrhea

#### Ovulation Abnormality


Certain ovulation or chromosomal abnormalities can cause the eggs involved in ovulation and menstruation to be prematurely depleted.

#### Genital Abnormalities

The absence of a uterus or vagina, vaginal septum, or imperforate hymen present since birth can also result in the absence of menstrual periods.

#### Hypothalamic Problems

The hypothalamus is a gland at the base of the brain that acts as the control center for the body and regulates your [menstrual cycle](#). A disorder of the hypothalamus causing an absence of menstruation is known as **functional hypothalamic [amenorrhea](#)**. Strenuous exercise, excessive weight loss as a result of [anorexia](#)



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### Michele Carelse, Clinical Psychologist



All of our natural remedies are formulated by our expert team of herbalists, naturopaths and homeopaths, and headed by Michele Carelse.

Michele has had years of experience in the manufacturing and use of natural remedies. In addition, she is a trained Clinical Psychologist and has been incorporating natural remedies into her treatment of patients with depression, anxiety, ADD, ADHD and stress for many years with spectacular results.

[nervosa](#), [bulimia](#) or [stress](#) may also contribute to interference in the normal functioning of the hypothalamus.

### **Pituitary Disease**

The pituitary gland is also responsible for regulating the [menstrual cycle](#). A tumor or invasive growth may hinder the pituitary gland's ability to perform this function.

### **Obesity**

Females who are obese often experience [amenorrhea](#) as a result of excess fat cells interfering with the process of ovulation.

### **Thyroid Disease**

An underactive thyroid causing [hypothyroidism](#) or an overactive thyroid causing [hyperthyroidism](#) may also be responsible for absent [menstrual cycles](#).

## **Secondary Amenorrhea**

### **Pregnancy**

Pregnancy is the most common cause of [amenorrhea](#) in women of reproductive age. Women do not ovulate when they are pregnant, thus menstruation stops.

### **Birth Control**

Often contraceptives such as birth control pills or hormonal injections can interfere with the menstrual cycle. If oral contraceptives are discontinued, regular ovulation and menstruation may take between 3-6 months to resume.

### **Excessive Exercise**

Athletes or women who participate in strenuous physical training can experience absent [menstrual cycles](#). There are many factors such as stress, low body fat and increased energy expenditure that contribute to athletes not having their periods.

### **Medical Conditions**

Medical conditions such as traumatic brain injury, tumors of the brain, ovary, or adrenal gland, ovarian cysts, overproduction of prolactin by the pituitary gland, hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism, chronic illness, and Asherman's syndrome (scarring of the uterine lining caused by infection or surgery) can also cause secondary [amenorrhea](#).

### **Premature Menopause**

Menopause that occurs before age 40 is considered premature menopause. It is also associated with secondary [amenorrhea](#) and may result from genetic factors or an autoimmune disease.

### **Hormonal Imbalance**

Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) is a disorder associated with hormonal imbalances and may also result in a loss of periods, obesity, acne, and at times, excess facial hair.

Other causes of secondary [amenorrhea](#) may be related to breastfeeding, physical and emotional stress, depression, certain medications, malnutrition, or sudden weight loss or weight gain.

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# Help for Amenorrhea

There are **various treatment options** depending on the cause to relieve the symptoms of [amenorrhea](#) and bring about a healthy, regular [menstrual cycle](#). Depending on your overall health, medical history, age, and the extent of your condition, medications, procedures or therapies may be used to treat [amenorrhea](#).

Common medications such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, birth control pills and hormone replacement therapy can help to **encourage normal, regular menstrual cycles** - although these medications have the potential risk of side effects. In addition, dietary modifications that include increased caloric and fat intake may also be beneficial.

## Natural Remedies

Although conventional medicine may help to alleviate the symptoms of [amenorrhea](#), they do not necessarily address the root of the problem. **Natural and holistic treatments** (from a reputable source) can help to **address the underlying physiological and nutritional imbalances** of the condition without the risk of harmful side effects, and promote harmony in a gentle yet effective manner.

Use herbs such as Vitex agnus-castus (Chasteberry) as an effective treatment to promote hormonal balance and health. Cimicifuga racemosa (Black Cohosh) contains phyto-estrogenic properties which are also effective in correcting menstrual irregularities. In addition, Eleutherococcus senticosus (Siberian Ginseng) is a highly respected Chinese herb that helps to restore vital energy and promote overall systemic functioning while also regulating the menstrual cycle and improving hormonal balance.

## Reducing the Risk of Developing Menstrual Disorders

If you are [overweight](#) or underweight, try to maintain a healthy weight and level of body fat by making appropriate changes to your diet and exercise routine.

Often, **being underweight or overweight can cause menstrual disorders**. Consult a doctor or dietician to help you make necessary adjustments to ensure a balanced diet.

Eat healthy and incorporate lots of vegetables, fruits, carbohydrates and protein into your diet. Reduce your intake of saturated fats, refined sugar, salt and caffeine.

Exercise regularly by walking, swimming, cycling or doing yoga. However, it may be necessary to reduce your exercise routine if it is excessive – some women exercise compulsively because they may fear weight gain, while athletes also struggle to cut back.

If you feel that your eating is compulsive and out of control, you should also be assessed for eating disorders. Eating disorders such as [anorexia nervosa](#) and [bulimia nervosa](#) often contribute to [amenorrhea](#).



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Increase your intake of vitamins by taking vitamin B6, calcium and magnesium supplements to relieve cramping and PMS symptoms.

Reduce [stress](#) levels by relaxing and resting more. Practice relaxation techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, progressive relaxation, biofeedback and yoga to quiet the mind and relax muscles. [Detox](#) and [body cleansing](#) can also be beneficial to help balance body systems.

Limit alcohol consumption and stop smoking naturally, as both habits can cause problems with your [menstrual cycle](#).

## The Natural Approach

While Western medicine has become the norm in many cultures, it is not the only treatment option. Conventional western medicine, often called allopathic medicine, is the system of medicine taught at most medical schools and most pharmaceutical and synthetic medicines are manufactured and marketed according to the principles of allopathic medicine. Allopathic medicine is also sometimes called orthodox medicine.

Because most of us in the Western world have grown up in a society in which allopathic medicine is the prevailing norm, we forget that only a few decades ago, **homeopathic, herbal and other natural medicines were commonly available – and freely used** even by conventional doctors. While there are often heated debates about which system of medicine is ‘better’ than the other, many responsible doctors (whether they are allopathic or not) recognize that both have a role to play in the treatment program.

Natural medicine has often been frowned upon by conventional doctors, especially by those who did not have sufficient knowledge of these medicines. However, it is encouraging to note that some medical schools are now beginning to re-introduce it into their course work, thereby providing doctors with a wider range of treatment options from which to choose. In many countries, especially in Europe, India and China, **natural and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed** by conventional doctors, and represent a significant part of the total annual drug sales.

Naturopathy is a branch of medicine (just as allopathy is a branch of medicine) which operates according to the underlying philosophy that the **body has an innate capacity to heal itself**. While natural medicines are often called ‘alternative’ or ‘complimentary’ medicines, they are, in fact, a unique and independent form of medicine in their own right, well able to treat a variety of conditions. Perhaps the term ‘holistic’ medicine is more apt, given the **broad range of treatment options and approaches** that are to be found within the practice of natural medicine. Holistic medicine encompasses many different disciplines, including herbalism, homeopathy, iridology, osteopathy, chiropractic, therapeutic massage techniques, aromatherapy, acupuncture and many, many more.

Most naturopaths will use a variety of treatment modalities in order to treat their patients in a holistic way to **support health, relieve symptoms, and prevent future disease**. In fact, even the World Health Organization defines health as being "...more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical,

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emotional, mental, and social well-being." This is a wonderfully clear description of holistic or natural medicine, which **strives to support health** (thereby relieving or preventing symptoms), rather than simply eliminating disease.

Although allopathic medicine certainly has a role to play and has made a tremendous contribution to medical science during the past century, there is a growing perception that it is not the only answer. In many cases, **holistic medicine can accomplish just as much**, if not more – without the risk of side effects, addiction, and sacrifice to health so commonly associated with pharmaceutical drugs.

Contrary to common perception-- and provided that they are manufactured in the correct way-- **natural medicines can work quickly and safely to promote healing**. In many cases, they can succeed where pharmaceutical drugs have failed. Despite frequent reports that they are ‘unproven’ and ‘untested’, the opposite is true. Natural medicines have a **long history of usage and there is a wealth of empirical evidence to support their effectiveness and safety**. In addition, active clinical research is carried out by many academic hospitals and universities to support the extensive traditional and empirical evidence behind natural medicines.

It is also important to know that like any medicine, **herbal and homeopathic medicines must be manufactured in the correct way**, following acceptable procedures and manufacturing methods to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Due to the recent rise in popularity of natural remedies, many companies have sprung up to take advantage of the market. Unfortunately, not all of them are equipped to manufacture to the correct standards, often resulting in a flood of inferior (and sometimes even unsafe) remedies onto the market – and giving natural remedies a bad name.

Even some pharmaceutical companies have rushed to claim their market share by producing so-called ‘standardized’ extracts of herbs and offering these as superior to the tried and tested methods of naturopathic manufacturing. Nothing could be further from the truth. While ‘standardized’ extracts may offer the benefit of easy consistency of dosage (and cheaper production lines), they have grave disadvantages, including an increase in side effects-- as the **medicines produced in this manner lose the natural protective properties** of the herbs. In some cases, these side effects have proved fatal – as was seen in the liver toxicity associated with standardized extracts of kava kava, a herb previously safely used for generations without any known side effects.

Most naturopaths recommend what is called the **Full Spectrum Method of extraction**, which retains the benefits of ALL the active ingredients within the herb as opposed to isolating only one – thereby providing a **more complete treatment** as well as **superior protection against side effects**.

Whatever your choice, always choose wisely. **Research what is best for you**. If you have a chronic or life-threatening condition, don’t make changes without first discussing them with your doctor in order that your condition may be monitored. Well informed and supportive practitioners will **support patients who want to take responsibility for their own health**.

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