



Ask Your Doctor

Missed Periods? Ask the right questions, get more helpful answers.

Your Period is an Important Vital Sign

Missing cycles can indicate more than stress or pregnancy. A vital sign is a measure of health, such as pulse rate, body temperature or respiration. We believe the menstrual cycle is also a vital sign and should be treated as one at every doctor's visit.

Sometimes missing menstrual cycles can be an early sign of a serious health problem. If your monthly cycles have gone missing, please see your health provider for an evaluation.

Understanding Hormones of the Menstrual Cycle

FSH, prolactin, and estradiol are important chemical messages in the blood.

- **Follicle-Stimulating Hormone (FSH)** is made by your pituitary gland, a small gland located underneath the brain. FSH plays an important role in human development and functioning. In women, FSH controls the menstrual cycle and stimulates the ovaries to make hormones and to prepare for releasing an egg once a month. A doctor measures the FSH level in the blood to determine ovarian health.
- **Estradiol** is a hormone produced by the ovaries. Estradiol is the most potent and important natural estrogen produced by girls and young women, as it is required in order to have menstrual cycles, get pregnant, and keep the bones and heart healthy. Estradiol also helps keep the skin and hair healthy and plays important roles in brain function. If untreated, estradiol deficiency is associated with shorter life expectancy.
- **Prolactin** is a hormone released by the pituitary gland. Prolactin stimulates breast development and milk production in women. Sometimes pituitary tumors cause the prolactin level in the blood to be high.



How do I know if my period is late?

If you don't have any known condition affecting your menstrual cycle, your period should start within 21 to 35 days of your last period, depending on your normal cycle. Regular periods can vary. However, if your regular cycle is 28 days and you still have not had your period on day 29, your period is officially considered late.

How do I know if my periods are irregular?

Your period might be irregular if:

- You are not having periods.
- Your periods are coming more than 35 days apart.
- Your periods are coming more frequently than every 21 days.
- You are having hot flashes or night sweats.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

If your period is late or irregular, it's important you ask these questions:

- Am I pregnant?
- Are my ovaries working normally?
- Are signals from my brain working normally?
- What is the level of FSH in my blood?
- What is the level of prolactin in my blood?
- What is the level of estradiol in my blood?

