

Aromatherapy and Dysmenorrhea

What is Dysmenorrhea?

NHS Choices says that dysmenorrhoea is:

“Period pain is common and a normal part of your menstrual cycle. Most women experience it at some point in their lives.

It's usually felt as painful muscle cramps in the tummy, which can spread to the back and thighs.

The pain sometimes comes in intense spasms, while at other times it may be dull but more constant.

It may also vary with each monthly period. Some periods may cause little or no discomfort, while others may be more painful.

Sometimes you may experience pelvic pain even when you don't have your period.

What causes period pain?

Period pain occurs when the muscular wall of the womb tightens (contracts). Mild contractions continually pass through your womb, but they're usually so mild that most women can't feel them.

During your period, the wall of the womb starts to contract more vigorously to encourage the womb lining to shed away as part of your monthly period.

When the muscular wall of the womb contracts, it compresses the blood vessels lining your womb. This temporarily cuts off the blood supply – and hence oxygen supply – to your womb. Without oxygen, the tissues in your womb release chemicals that trigger pain.

While your body is releasing these pain-triggering chemicals, it's also producing other chemicals called prostaglandins. These encourage the womb muscles to contract more, further increasing the level of pain.

It's not known why some women experience more period pain than others. It may be that some women have a build-up of prostaglandins, which means they experience stronger contractions.

Period pain caused by a condition

Less commonly, period pain can be caused by an underlying medical condition. Doctors sometimes call this secondary dysmenorrhoea.

Period pain linked to an underlying condition tends to affect older women. Women aged 30 to 45 are most commonly affected.

Conditions that can cause period pain include:

- endometriosis – where cells that normally line the womb start to grow in other places, such as in the fallopian tubes and ovaries; these cells can cause intense pain when they shed and fall away
- fibroids – non-cancerous tumours that can grow in the womb and can make your periods heavy and painful
- pelvic inflammatory disease – where your womb, fallopian tubes and ovaries become infected with bacteria, causing them to become severely inflamed
- adenomyosis – where the tissue that normally lines the womb starts to grow within the muscular womb wall, making your periods particularly painful

An intrauterine device (IUD) is a type of contraception made from copper and plastic that fits inside the womb. It can also sometimes cause period pain, particularly during the first few months after it's inserted.

You may notice a change in your normal pattern of pain if your period pain is linked to one of the above conditions. For example, the pain may be more severe or it may last much longer than normal.

If your period pain is caused by an underlying condition, you may also experience:

- irregular periods
- bleeding in between periods
- a thick or foul-smelling vaginal discharge
- pain during sex

See your GP if you experience any of these symptoms.

How can I treat period pain?

In most cases period pain is mild enough to treat at home.

Painkillers

You can take ibuprofen and aspirin to help manage your pain. However, don't take ibuprofen or aspirin if you have asthma or stomach, kidney or liver problems. Aspirin shouldn't be given to anyone under 16 years of age.

You could also try paracetamol, but studies have shown that it doesn't reduce pain as effectively as ibuprofen or aspirin.

If ordinary painkillers are ineffective, your GP may prescribe a stronger painkiller, such as naproxen or codeine.

Other things to try

- stopping smoking – smoking is thought to increase the risk of period pain
- exercise – you may not feel like exercising during a painful period, but keeping active can reduce pain; try some gentle swimming, walking or cycling
- heat – putting a heat pad or hot water bottle (wrapped in a tea towel) on your tummy may help reduce pain
- warm bath or shower – taking a warm bath or shower can relieve pain and help you relax
- massage – light, circular massage around your lower abdomen may also help reduce pain
- relaxation techniques – relaxing activities, such as yoga or Pilates, may help distract you from feelings of pain and discomfort
- transcutaneous electronic nerve stimulation (TENS) – a small battery-operated device that delivers a mild electrical current to your tummy, which can help reduce pain.”

How Can Aromatherapy Help with Dysmenorrhea?

Certain essential oils may help to reduce the pain and muscle spasm associated with dysmenorrhea. These include:

- Clary Sage (*Salvia sclarea*)
- Roman Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*)
- Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*)
- Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)
- Marjoram (*Origanum majorana*)
- Rose (*Rosa damascena*)
- Jasmine (*Jasminum grandiflorum*)



Always contact a qualified Aromatherapist who will guide you on the oils that are suitable for your individual needs.

References:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/period-pain/>

The Art of Aromatherapy by Robert Tisserand

Aromatherapy – An A-Z by Patricia Davies

The Complete Guide to Aromatherapy by Salvatore Battaglia

The Encyclopedia of Essential Oils by Julia Lawless

Encyclopedia of Aromatherapy by Chrissie Wildwood

Essential Oils in Colour by Rosemary Caddy

Aromatherapy Workbook by Marcel Lavabre

To find a practitioner to discuss your needs [click here](#)