

Is It Normal to Skip a Period? Common Reasons for a Missed Period

Your period usually arrives every month.

Then suddenly—it doesn't.

A missed period can have you wondering:

Am I pregnant?

Is something wrong with my hormones?

Could stress have caused this?

Is skipping one period normal?

The short answer is that **an occasional missed period can happen for several reasons and does not always mean something is seriously wrong.**

Pregnancy is the most common natural reason for a missed period in someone who is sexually active, however periods can also disappear or become irregular for different reasons such as stress, weight changes, intense exercise, breastfeeding, birth control, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), thyroid disorders, perimenopause, and other medical conditions.

The medical term for the absence of menstrual periods is **amenorrhea**. ACOG defines secondary amenorrhea as going **three months or longer without a period** after previously menstruating.

So one late or skipped period does not automatically mean you have amenorrhea or a serious health condition, But it is still worth paying attention to.

What Is Considered a Normal Menstrual Cycle?

A menstrual cycle is counted from the **first day of one period to the first day of the next.**

According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, most adult menstrual cycles last approximately **21 to 35 days**. A typical period lasts around two to seven days.

Not every woman has a period every 28 days.

Your normal cycle might be:

25 days.

30 days.

33 days.

And some variation from one month to another can occur.

The more important question is whether your cycle has suddenly changed from what is normal **for you**.

For example, if your periods have arrived every 28 to 30 days for years and suddenly you go 50 or 60 days without one, that deserves more attention than a cycle that arrives a few days later than expected.

First Question: Could You Be Pregnant?

If you are sexually active and pregnancy is possible, pregnancy should be one of the first possibilities you consider.

A missed period is often one of the earliest signs of pregnancy.

The Office on Women's Health states that most home pregnancy tests can detect pregnancy after a missed period, although

testing too early may produce a false-negative result because pregnancy hormone levels may still be too low.

If your period does not arrive:

Take a home pregnancy test.

Follow the instructions carefully.

If the result is negative but your period still does not come, repeat the test after several days or contact your healthcare provider.

Women with irregular periods may have a harder time knowing when to test because ovulation does not necessarily happen at the same time every month.

Stress Can Delay or Stop a Period

It's true, stress really can affect your menstrual cycle.

The reproductive system communicates with the brain through a complex hormonal system involving the hypothalamus, pituitary gland, and ovaries.

Significant physical or emotional stress can interfere with this communication.

NICHD lists emotional stress among the factors associated with **hypothalamic amenorrhea**, a condition in which the brain slows or stops releasing the hormonal signals needed to maintain normal menstrual cycles.

Stress might come from:

- Work
- School
- Relationship problems
- Financial problems
- Grief
- Major life changes

- Illness
- Lack of sleep
- Intense emotional pressure

One stressful week does not automatically make your period disappear.

But significant or prolonged stress can affect cycles in some women.

If stress has become a major issue in your life, you may also find our article on [What Causes High Cortisol? Understanding Stress Hormones and Cortisol Imbalance](#) helpful.

Rapid Weight Loss Can Affect Your Period

Your reproductive system needs adequate energy.

Rapid weight loss, very low calorie intake, eating disorders, or very low body fat can interfere with normal ovulation.

ACOG lists:

- Low body weight
- Rapid weight loss
- Eating disorders

among possible causes of secondary amenorrhea.

This is one reason extremely restrictive dieting is not harmless.

If your calorie intake becomes too low relative to your body's needs, your brain may reduce the hormonal signals involved in reproduction.

Your period may become irregular or stop completely.

If you are trying to lose weight, focus on a sustainable eating pattern rather than severe calorie restriction.

Our [Healthy Diet for Women to Stay Fit](#) guide provides a more balanced approach to nutrition.

Intense Exercise Can Also Affect Menstruation

Exercise is healthy.

But extremely intense physical activity combined with inadequate calorie intake can disrupt the menstrual cycle.

This is sometimes seen in:

- Competitive athletes
- Distance runners
- Dancers
- Gymnasts
- Women doing very intense daily workouts
- Women combining heavy exercise with severe dieting

NICHD specifically identifies strenuous exercise that burns more calories than are consumed as a possible contributor to hypothalamic amenorrhea.

That does not mean exercise is bad for women.

It means your body needs enough food and recovery to support your activity level.

PCOS Can Cause Skipped Periods

Polycystic ovary syndrome, or PCOS, is one of the most common hormonal causes of irregular or missed periods.

Women with PCOS may not ovulate regularly.

When ovulation does not occur consistently, periods can:

- Come late
- Skip months
- Become unpredictable
- Sometimes become very heavy when they finally occur

NICHD lists skipped or absent periods among the common symptoms of PCOS.

Other possible PCOS symptoms include:

- Facial or body hair growth
- Persistent acne
- Scalp hair thinning
- Difficulty getting pregnant
- Dark, velvety patches of skin
- Weight-management difficulties

But having one missed period does **not** mean you have PCOS.

PCOS is diagnosed by looking at menstrual patterns, androgen-related symptoms or laboratory findings, ovarian characteristics when needed, and other possible causes.

Thyroid Problems Can Affect Your Period

Your thyroid gland produces hormones that influence metabolism and many other body functions.

Both an **underactive thyroid** and an **overactive thyroid** can cause menstrual irregularities, including missed periods.

Depending on the thyroid condition, other symptoms may include:

- Unusual fatigue
- Weight changes
- Feeling unusually cold
- Feeling unusually hot
- Changes in heart rate
- Hair changes
- Constipation or frequent bowel movements
- Mood changes

These symptoms overlap with many other conditions, so they do not diagnose thyroid disease by themselves.

A healthcare professional can order thyroid blood tests when appropriate.

Birth Control Can Cause Periods to Stop

Certain hormonal contraceptives can make periods extremely light or stop them completely.

These may include:

- Some birth control pills
- Hormonal IUDs
- Injectable contraceptives
- Certain implants

NICHD notes that hormonal contraceptives can cause amenorrhea and that it may take some time after stopping certain methods for menstrual cycles to become regular again.

If your birth-control method is known to reduce menstrual bleeding, not having a monthly period does not necessarily mean something is wrong.

However, if pregnancy is possible or you are unsure whether your bleeding pattern is expected with your contraceptive, contact your healthcare provider.

Breastfeeding Can Stop Periods

Breastfeeding can naturally delay the return of menstrual periods after childbirth.

Hormones involved in milk production can suppress ovulation.

Some breastfeeding women regain their periods relatively quickly.

Others may go many months without menstruating.

NICHD lists breastfeeding as a normal physiological cause of amenorrhea.

However, breastfeeding does **not** guarantee that pregnancy cannot occur.

Ovulation can happen before the first postpartum period appears.

Perimenopause Can Make Periods Unpredictable

As women approach menopause, menstrual cycles often become less predictable.

During **perimenopause**, periods may:

- Come closer together
- Come farther apart
- Be skipped
- Become lighter
- Become heavier
- Last longer or shorter

The Office on Women's Health notes that irregular cycles are common during the transition toward menopause.

But do not automatically assume that every missed period in your 40s is perimenopause.

Pregnancy can still occur before menopause.

A healthcare professional can also evaluate other causes when necessary.

Menopause itself is generally recognized after **12 consecutive months without a menstrual period** when another cause is not responsible.

Some Medications Can Affect Periods

Certain medications may interfere with ovulation or menstrual bleeding.

NICHD notes that some:

- Antidepressants
- Blood-pressure medicines
- Hormonal treatments
- Cancer treatments

can contribute to amenorrhea in certain circumstances.

Do not stop a prescription medication simply because your period changed.

Instead, tell the healthcare professional who prescribed it.



Primary Ovarian Insufficiency

Another possible—but less common—reason periods may stop is **primary ovarian insufficiency**, or POI.

POI occurs when the ovaries stop functioning normally before the typical age of menopause.

Periods may become:

- Irregular
- Infrequent

- Absent

POI is not exactly the same thing as menopause because women with POI may occasionally ovulate.

It deserves medical evaluation because estrogen levels, fertility, and long-term bone and cardiovascular health may be affected.

What About Skipping Just One Period?

A single missed period can happen.

Maybe you were:

Very stressed.

Sick.

Traveling.

Sleeping poorly.

Dieting aggressively.

Training intensely.

Or your ovulation simply occurred later than usual.

If pregnancy is possible, take a pregnancy test.

Then pay attention to what happens over the next cycle.

One missed period followed by a return to your normal pattern may not signal a major problem.

But repeated missed periods deserve evaluation.

When Should You See a Doctor?

ACOG recommends medical evaluation when a woman who previously menstruated has gone **three months or longer without a period and there is no clear explanation.**

You may want to seek care sooner if missed periods occur along with symptoms such as:

- Significant pelvic pain
- New facial or body hair
- Severe acne
- Significant unexplained weight changes
- Milky nipple discharge when you are not breastfeeding
- Severe headaches
- Vision changes
- Symptoms of thyroid disease
- Difficulty getting pregnant
- Very heavy bleeding when your period returns

Your healthcare provider may ask about:

- Pregnancy possibility
- Menstrual history
- Weight changes
- Exercise
- Stress
- Medications
- Birth control
- Other symptoms

Depending on your situation, testing may include a pregnancy test, thyroid testing, reproductive-hormone tests, androgen testing, or imaging.

A Missed Period Plus Severe Pain Needs Special Attention

There is one situation that should not be treated as an ordinary late period.

An **ectopic pregnancy** occurs when a pregnancy develops outside the uterus, most commonly in a fallopian tube.

Early symptoms can include:

- A missed period

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding
- Pelvic or abdominal pain
- Cramping on one side

More serious symptoms can include:

- Sudden severe abdominal or pelvic pain
- Shoulder pain
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Fainting

A ruptured ectopic pregnancy can cause life-threatening internal bleeding. ACOG recommends emergency care for severe pain, shoulder pain, weakness, dizziness, or fainting when an ectopic pregnancy is possible.

Track Your Periods

One of the simplest things you can do is track your cycles.

Record:

- The first day of your period
- How long bleeding lasts
- Whether you skipped a month
- How heavy bleeding becomes
- Pelvic pain
- Spotting
- Other symptoms

You can use:

A calendar.

A notes app.

A period-tracking app.

Patterns are much easier to discuss with a healthcare professional when you have actual dates.

Instead of saying:

“My periods are kind of irregular,”

you can say:

“My cycles were 29 days, 31 days, 58 days, and then 46 days.”

That gives your provider much more useful information.

Can Food Help Regulate Your Period?

A nutritious diet supports overall reproductive health, but no single food can guarantee a monthly period.

If missed periods are related to inadequate calorie intake, severe dieting, or nutritional deficiency, improving nutrition may be part of treatment.

But if your periods are being affected by:

PCOS.

Thyroid disease.

Primary ovarian insufficiency.

Pregnancy.

Medication.

or another medical condition,

food alone may not solve the underlying problem.

The right approach depends on the cause.

If you want help building an eating and fitness routine around your individual goals, schedule, preferences, and lifestyle, you can learn more about our [Custom Women's Diet & Fitness Plan](#).

The Bottom Line

Is it normal to skip a period?

Sometimes.

A single missed period can happen and does not automatically mean you have a serious medical problem.

But a missed period is also something worth paying attention to—especially if it is unusual for you.

Possible reasons include:

- Pregnancy
- Stress
- Rapid weight loss
- Very low calorie intake
- Intense exercise
- PCOS
- Thyroid disorders
- Hormonal birth control
- Breastfeeding
- Perimenopause
- Certain medications
- Primary ovarian insufficiency
- Other medical conditions

If pregnancy is possible, take a pregnancy test.

If your period returns and your cycle goes back to normal, the missed period may have been temporary.

But if periods repeatedly disappear, become very irregular, or stop for approximately three months without a clear explanation, make an appointment with a healthcare professional.

And if a missed period occurs with severe one-sided pelvic pain, shoulder pain, weakness, dizziness, or fainting, seek urgent medical attention because an ectopic pregnancy must be ruled out.

Your period does not have to arrive on the exact same calendar date every month.

But your menstrual pattern can provide valuable information about your reproductive and overall health.

When something changes, pay attention.

This article is for general educational purposes and is not intended to diagnose or treat menstrual disorders, pregnancy, or other medical conditions. Speak with a qualified healthcare professional about persistent missed periods, abnormal bleeding, pelvic pain, fertility concerns, or other symptoms that concern you.