



It might feel like you're the only one experiencing odd period probs but, rest assured, these less-talked-about menstrual symptoms are surprisingly standard.

That weird thing your period does?

It's actually v. normal *(pheew)*

BY ERIN SARGENT

AH, PERIODS.

They are kind of like crushes: Just when you think you have them figured out, they throw you for a loop.

In case it wasn't enough fun having to master myriad menstrual product options (Pads? Tampons? Period undies? All three?!) or being routinely sidelined by symptoms (cramps, headaches, fatigue, bloating, so fun) or even just figuring out your flow (first it was six days, then four, now it just feels like... forever?), sometimes periods go from super confusing to downright bizarre.

Even in this time of period positivity (and we're so here for that), there are those mysteries that people who menstruate are still afraid to mention.

From pains to poops, we're here to help you tackle all those lesser-known, that-time-of-the-month troubles.

VAGINAL DISCHARGE

You feel like you might be starting your period, but days before you see blood spots you notice something else in your undies.

WHAT'S UP: Vaginal discharge (a clear or white mucus) is common in the days leading up to your period. "Your vagina is a muscular tube that cleans itself—and it does it all the time," says pediatrician and puberty expert Dr. Cara Natterson. Vaginal discharge is just a sign that your body is doing exactly what it's supposed to do: self-cleaning. As the mucus is leaving your vagina, it takes any bacteria or potential irritants with it.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT: Period underwear, breathable cotton underwear and pantliners are all great options if you are experiencing heavier discharge, as they all wick away extra moisture.

WHEN TO WONDER: If you notice your discharge is really thick, yellow or even a little greenish (or if it smells), talk to your doctor. It could be a

sign that your body is trying to get rid of bad bacteria or a yeast infection.

HEAVY FLOW

You stock up on super tampons when it's your time of the month—and it feels like you're constantly changing your pad.



CRAVINGS

You're reviewing quadratic equations before tomorrow's quiz...when you suddenly decide you *must* have a bowl of penne pasta with a side of Sour Patch Kids, like, right now.

WHAT'S UP: Yep, this is one you can def blame on hormones. According to Dr. Janneke Volkert, a family medicine doctor in Missoula, Mont., serotonin drops dramatically during your period, which leads to those instant carb and sugar cravings.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT: They might give your body a quick boost, but simple carbs like sugar will just leave you wanting more. "Instead, go for food that has protein and complex carbs like a turkey sandwich on whole grain bread. You'll burn through the calories more slowly, and your energy will be better overall," advises Dr. Volkert.

WHEN TO WONDER: If you feel like grabbing one piece of candy as an after-dinner treat, no harm, no foul. But since a giant bag of watermelon gummies won't quite solve your period sitch (and could even make you feel worse), you may want to ditch the sweets 'til next week.

WHAT'S UP: As anyone who has a period knows, there are heavier days and lighter days. On average, you lose three to four tablespoons of blood during your period. The first and last days of your cycle might be light spotting, while the middle two might seem torrential. It's all in how your body gears up to shed your uterine lining—and every body is different.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT: Understanding your flow can help you nix stain surprises. Download a period tracking app (we love MagicGirl—free on iOS and Google) to help gauge flow trends and symptoms.

WHEN TO WONDER: If you've only had a few periods, it can be hard to know whether you're dealing with a heavy flow worth worrying about. Dr. Natterson's scale? Heavy bleeding (soaking through a pad or tampon in about two hours) one or two days of your cycle is one thing, five or six days is another.



WEIGHT FLUCTUATION

You notice mid-flow that your fave jeans just don't fit the same way. And there's only so much frustration you can take, thankyouverymuch.

WHAT'S UP: The truth is that your weight is always in flux, thanks to all the factors that make life, well, life. During your period, you might notice a weight change because of fluid retention. The hormone progesterone increases during menstruation, which causes your body to hold onto water (aka why you might feel bloated during your period).

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT: It sounds counterintuitive, but drinking *more* water will help bust bloat. Try swapping foods high in sodium for potassium-rich snacks, too (hey there, bananas).

WHEN TO WONDER: Anytime you experience significant weight gain or loss without explanation, it's time to talk to your doctor.

MOOD SWINGS

You're cracking up at your BFF's text one sec, then nearly in tears the next, wondering if anyone even likes you.

WHAT'S UP: As your bod adjusts to up-and-down hormone levels throughout your cycle, it's common for you to feel highs and lows, too. Just before your period, you might feel bouts of frustration, sadness or irritability.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT: Be gentle on yourself! Your body is going through a lot during your period. Instead of fighting through your feelings or beating yourself up for who-knows-what, slow down a bit, advises Dr. Volkert. Mellow out by doing something that calms your mind, like journaling, listening to music or taking a bath.

WHEN TO WONDER: "Observe how drastically your moods affect you," advises Dr. Volkert. If your down moments are impacting your everyday, it's time to chat with a therapist.

MIGRAINES

Every cycle you find yourself in bed, lights off and sounds shut out, nursing a brutal headache.

WHAT'S UP: Anyone who experiences migraines knows they can start with the smallest of triggers. That said, "let's reframe the hormone blame game," says Dr. Natterson. Sure, your hormones being in flux can hurt your head, but so

can sugary cravings, hydration choices and less-than-stellar sleep.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT: The best way to beat painful period migraines? Stop them before they start. Learn your triggers and take steps to tame them (whether that's drinking more water, avoiding certain foods or taking over-the-counter pain relievers).

WHEN TO WONDER: If your migraines are debilitating (or if you experience them outside of your period), talk to your doctor about treatment options like bio-feedback, acupuncture or medication.

ACHY BOOBS

Cue you, five minutes before gym class, doubling up on sports bras and praying you don't have to run the mile today.

WHAT'S UP: Just started menstruating? Your breasts are still growing, says Dr. Natterson. That new tissue is super sensitive—and that tenderness is only increased by changing estrogen and progesterone levels, especially in the days leading up to your period.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT: It might be tempting to keep your breasts on lockdown, but Dr. Natterson actually advises the opposite: Wear bras that are supportive but that don't restrict movement. That way, you can avoid sweatiness, itchiness and added discomfort.

WHEN TO WONDER: Good news, there's no real underlying worry here. Swollen


chest and tender breasts just happen to be a part of periods (and, when you're younger, puberty in general). As you get older and your breasts finish developing, you might not have to deal with this symptom as regularly.

PERIOD POOP

How do we put this delicately? You might be noticing...well...odd bowel movements while you're on your period. Bottom line? There's just a lot going on there during your menstrual cycle.

WHAT'S UP: According to Dr. Volkert, the cells that make up your uterus release hormones called prostaglandins, which help your body start your period. But prostaglandins can also end up affecting your bowels, which can lead to constipation before your period and diarrhea during. While toilet troubles aren't exactly super fun, number two probs aren't a number one worry—it happens to almost everyone. (Prostaglandins are also the culprit for your potential period nausea. Yep, that's totally normal, too.)

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT: Changes to your diet are a big help: Try high-fiber foods like apples, leafy greens, oats and whole grains to help normalize your digestion.

WHEN TO WONDER: Your bowel movements are affected by dehydration, so if you're experiencing minor discomfort, drink extra water. Things still seem off? See your doc. 

HAVE YOU HEARD THE ONE ABOUT...

These menstrual mysteries had us perplexed, too.

SYNCHRONIZED CYCLES

Old wives' tale or legit period anomaly? Some scientists argue that women's hormones (chemicals that bodies release to interact with other bodies) signal to other women when they are menstruating as an evolutionary benefit. Others say that varying cycle lengths mean, statistically, your period is bound to align with your friend's every once in a while. Either way, isn't it kind of nice to go through it with your bestie sometimes?

PERIOD FOG

Feeling like you're in a haze? Like most symptoms, "period fog" (aka "why why why isn't my brain working?!") can be traced back to estrogen and progesterone levels. Not only is your body dealing with physical symptoms, but you're also adjusting to rapidly rising and falling hormone shifts, which can leave your mind feeling a little behind.

VOCAL CHANGES

You might not be able to hear it, but your voice does shift when you're on your period, if even just slightly. A study by the National Center for Biotechnology Information revealed that hormone receptors in your vocal cords can alter the pitch that you speak at different points in your menstrual cycle. Don't let this stop you from singing in the shower, though.

COVID AND YOUR CYCLE

Information is still emerging, but irregularities have been reported in some cases of "long COVID." Scientists have begun to study these shifts in menstrual cycles and, as time goes by, we'll know more. But when it comes to vaccines, the science is clear. "There's absolutely no data that the COVID vaccine or any other vaccine interferes with hormone cycling," says Dr. Natterson. "There's no mechanism that we can come up with as to how that could happen."