

Women & Their Menstrual Cycles

Women today have an estimated 450 periods during their lifetime – that is three times as many as our hunter-gatherer ancestors, who started menstruating later and spent many more years pregnant or nursing. Because periods have become a larger part of women’s lives, many feel its effects in ways they do not welcome, and they admit they do not always feel friendly toward their monthly “friend.”

In addition to mixed feelings about their periods, many women possess surprisingly little knowledge about how their menstrual cycle works. Many believe it is natural to have a period while on the birth control pill when, in fact, monthly bleeding that occurs during the seven-day break from the pill is not menstrual bleeding at all, but a symptom of the short-term hormone deprivation known as withdrawal bleeding. Furthermore, many believe it is possible to get pregnant or ovulate during their menstrual period, which is not the case.

A recent survey from the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (ARHP), conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, examined women’s attitudes and knowledge about their menstrual cycle. Following are some highlights from the survey.

HOW DOES THE PERIOD AFFECT WOMEN TODAY...

- Women regularly experience the physical and emotional symptoms of the menstrual cycle in the week before and during their periods:
 - 84% report feeling bloated
 - 84% report feeling moody
 - 81% report having cramps
 - 80% report feeling irritable
 - 78% report feeling fatigued
 - 67% report feelings of anger
- Before and during their periods, 62% of women report an increased desire for sex, but 74% sometimes (33%) or many times (41%) say their symptoms have caused them to “miss sex.”
- Many women report experiencing severe symptoms during their menstrual periods. Sixty-four percent of the respondents often or sometimes experience heavy bleeding and 63% experience “really bad cramps.”

HOW DO WOMEN FEEL ABOUT THE IMPACT THE PERIOD HAS ON THEIR LIVES...

- 77% view their menstrual periods as something that they have to put up with.
- 74% feel men have an advantage because they do not have their period.
- 47% would like to decide when or if to have a period.
- 43% feel they have to make adjustments to their lives when they have their period.
- 40% would prefer never to have their period at all, if given a choice.

SOME COMMON QUESTIONS. . .

- Is it natural for a woman to get her period, even if she is on the pill?
 - According to the ARHP survey, 67% believe that it's natural for a woman to get her period, even if she is on the pill.
 - In fact: The 28-day menstrual cycle, while on hormonal contraception, is man made. The developers of the pill designed the medication to be taken so that it would cause a monthly bleed every 28 days, believing that women would feel more comfortable if they continued to bleed each month.
- Is it natural not to have a period?
 - According to the ARHP survey, 66% are very or somewhat worried that it just doesn't seem natural to not have a period and 89% are very or somewhat worried that there might be long-term health effects if they delay or stop their period.
 - In fact: Many OB/GYNs say that a monthly period is not medically necessary. According to a Gallup¹ survey, 99% of female OB/GYNs view that menstrual suppression – the daily use of oral contraceptives to stop monthly periods – is safe for their patients.
- Are women attached to their monthly visitor, “Aunt Flo?”
 - In fact: The ARHP survey found women have little affection toward their period. Only 8% say that in some ways they enjoy their period.

DID YOU KNOW...

About the Survey

The Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (ARHP) commissioned Greenberg Quinlan Rosner to conduct a web survey of 1,021 women between the ages of 18-40 who had not had hysterectomies and were not currently trying to get pregnant. Respondents were selected randomly from a panel of Knowledge Networks research participants. The Knowledge Networks panel, which uses telephone recruiting and provides internet access to its participants, is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. In-depth interviews were also conducted with 25 OB/GYNs, primary care physicians, nurse practitioners and physical assistants who have patient contact and prescribe contraceptives.

About The Association of Reproductive Health Professionals

The Association of Reproductive Health Professionals (ARHP) is a non-profit membership association composed of highly qualified and committed experts in reproductive health. Its members are health professionals in clinical practice, education, research, and advocacy. They include physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurse midwives, researchers, educators, pharmacists, and other professionals in reproductive health. To learn more, visit: www.arhp.org.

About Greenberg Quinlan Rosner

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner is a global leader in public opinion research and strategic consulting, working with non-profits, corporations, issue groups, and political campaigns throughout the United States and around the world. To learn more, visit: www.gqrr.com.

¹ The Gallup Organization in September 2003 conducted a national survey of the health habits of women obstetrician-gynecologists for the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). The survey interviewed, via telephone, 301 women OB/GYNs, a representative sample of female Fellow and Junior Fellow members of ACOG who currently practice in the U.S. The survey had an estimated error rate due to sampling and other random effects of plus or minus seven percentage points (95% confidence level). Details of the survey: http://www.acog.org/from_home/publications/press_releases/nr12-09-03-2.cfm