

Having irregular periods may be a common problem among women here, say gynaecologists. But there are women who tend to suffer more than others.

Student Chng Wen Yi says her periods are so “crazily irregular” that the intervals between each cycle can be anywhere between two weeks and two months. The duration is equally erratic, ranging from two days to 20 days. It is also a painful affair. The 19-year-old suffers from monthly cramps and says her general practitioner has advised her to “rest more to keep stress at bay”. “It has been like this since I was 11,” she adds. “My sisters and mum have similar problems but mine is the most serious in the family.”

According to Dr Wee Horng Yen, deputy head of the [department of obstetrics and gynaecology](#) at [KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital \(KKH\)](#), normal menstrual bleeding lasts between two and seven days. Each cycle should occur anywhere between 24 and 35 days. Women who have menstruation cycles that deviate from the norm, he says, are usually those going through puberty or nearing menopause.

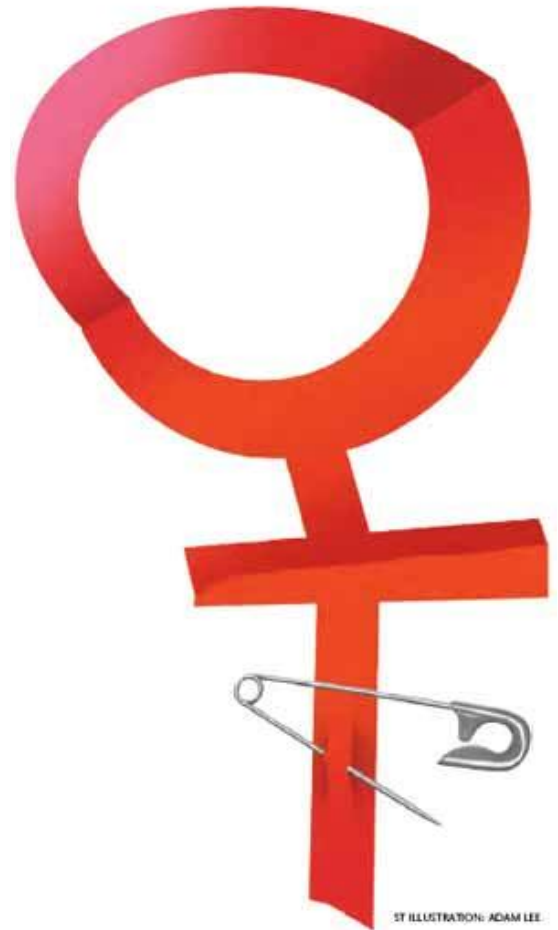
These women with irregular periods are further classified into two groups. Dr Wee explains that there are women who do not menstruate for a prolonged period of time, sometimes up to six months. Women who bleed mid-way through their cycle, every three weeks or for more than a week, are also considered to have irregular periods. The problem seems to be affecting many women here. Although there are no concrete numbers, Raffles Hospital’s obstetrics and gynaecology specialist Dr Watt Wing Fong says irregular period complaints is the second most common problem that women consult gynaecologists about.

Other common menstrual problems they complain about are painful periods and heavy flow during menstruation. Dr Watt says common contributing factors are “more stress in modern-day society” and “more cases of overweight women” due to lack of exercise. He adds: “There is either an absolute increase or people are getting more educated and seeing doctors for such problems.”

Although external factors do play a part in affecting a woman’s menstrual cycle temporarily, he explains having an irregular period could be linked to other causes such as the presence of ovarian cysts or fibroids in a woman’s reproductive system. Having an irregular period is not to be taken lightly. He points out that menstruating irregularly could increase the risk of uterine cancer, which affects the lining of the womb. He explains the risk of cancer cells developing: “If the menses is delayed, the lining of the womb does not shed and may continue to grow thick.”

Women with irregular periods might have problems conceiving as well, says Dr Ann Tan, an obstetrician and gynaecologist at the Women & Fetal Centre. She says: “Irregular menses means erratic ovulation or no ovulation, which implies difficulty in conception.” However, Dr Watt says there is a fertility pill to help women who are trying to have children. This pill, he cautions, should be “reserved only for those planning to conceive” as prolonged use may increase the risk of ovarian cancer. For those hoping to regulate their periods, birth-control pills, which help control the body’s hormones, are usually prescribed.

Ms Angela Tan, a salesgirl in her mid-20s, says going on the pill has helped to tame her once painful and irregular periods that she has had since she was a teenager. She says her periods were so erratic, it was impossible to predict when they would start. The duration of her menses, she adds, would also sometimes be longer or shorter depending on her cycle for the month. After being on the pill for half a year, Ms Tan says: “My period is now very regular.”



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