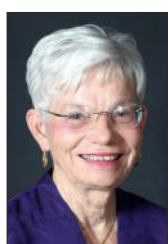


Diet can help smooth menstruation's rough edges

Q I am quite miserable during my monthly period. Can diet make a difference? MEM, Winterville

A Hey guys, before you say today's article isn't for me, there is some advice that Jenna Hamed has not only for the ladies but for you, too. Jenna, a second-year Brody School of Medicine student explores ways that diet and also support from you and others can help women who struggle with symptoms during their menstrual cycle feel better. Jenna just finished a six-week medical nutrition education experience with the nutrition teams at Brody and ECU Health. She has a strong interest in Women's Health, including OB.

Women, even medical students, find that having a period that leaves you feeling less than your best can be inconvenient. Researchers have found that eating healthy foods, like those included in the Mediterranean way of eating, may decrease symptoms like bloating, nausea, heavy bleeding and headaches. I recommend trying to eat foods that lower swelling and lower insulin resistance, as well as foods



KATHY KOLASA

that provide important chemicals needed by the body for a healthy cycle.

Dr. Kolasa has written often about the Mediterranean style of eating as a great way to reduce risks for many health conditions experienced by both men and women. Now add promoting a healthy menstrual cycle as another good reason to eat the Mediterranean way. In the case of maintaining a healthy menstrual cycle, all four natural phases (menstruation, the follicular phase, ovulation and the luteal phases) benefit from nutrients like vitamin D, Omega 3s, dietary fiber, calcium, iron, vitamin K and magnesium that help lower inflammation or swelling.

Those nutrients are found in the Mediterranean diet, so it is important to eat healthily most days of the month. Many women tell us they crave junk food during their period. Those high-fat and high-sugar foods provide few of the needed nutrients, and eating

them or other "comfort foods" might actually make you feel worse.

Also, you need not struggle with uncomfortable symptoms of menstruation alone. The men, your children and others in your life, can help during this time by shopping, cooking and cleaning up. If they don't volunteer, ask for help. When your partner realizes that getting important vitamins and minerals will help decrease symptoms like tender breasts, bloating, fluid retention, muscle aches, joint pain, headaches, acne, abdominal cramps and diarrhea, they will help you be your more cheerful, energetic self.

Even if you don't like water, let your partner "nag" you a little to drink 72-80 ounces of water a day — water is important to maintain a healthy cycle. Also, ask your partner and others not to tempt you with those less healthy comfort foods that actually don't provide comfort.

As a medical student, I have found many women don't understand their period. The average menstrual cycle lasts about 28 days. Many women experience mood swings, swelling, cramp-

ing, tiredness, stomach pain and headache. There are hormones, like estrogen and progesterone, that naturally go up and down over those 28 days.

Hormones are chemical signals in our body that act like messengers and are delivered to different parts of our bodies. These hormones have lots of jobs to do in our body, even during our period. Cortisol is the chemical released by stress in the body which can cause tiredness, weariness and weight gain. It can also stop ovulation or stop the travel of our egg. Insulin resistance is when the cells in the body are "locked up," so then the pancreas makes too much insulin. Eating healthy helps the body better manage the stress of this "time of the month."

Health-promoting foods will reduce inflammation and support hormones to keep your cycle on track. The inflammation in the female organs during your period is short-lived. However, if long-term inflammation is happening as a result of stress, worrying, poor gut health, smoking, poor food choices or too little exercise, the cycle might stop, resulting in lon-

ger periods with heavy bleeding.

The bottom line is to prevent inflammation and to help make estrogen and progesterone work well, load your plate with whole plant-based foods like those in the Med way. If you send Dr. Kolasa an email (kolasaka@ecu.edu), we will send you a copy of our ECU Family Medicine Mediterranean Diet plate handout. Women who are on no-carb or low-carb diets, like Keto, often experience more undesirable symptoms during their period.

Research tells us women with food sensitivities to gluten or lactose may be worse at this time, so care to avoid those foods may help. Many women tell us that when they feel really bad, they reach for junk foods like sweets, fatty pizza, wings, and chips. Again, resist the urge. Making little changes can help to lower how much sugar and saturated fats you get in your diet, every day.

Professor emeritus Kathy Kolasa, a registered dietitian nutritionist and Ph.D., is an affiliate professor in the Brody School of Medicine at ECU. Contact her at kolasaka@ecu.edu.

Several options are available for pain after lung surgery

Q After a thoracotomy for lung cancer surgery, I had pain and tingling, along with tightness and spasms, in my midriff. I was told it would ease, but it hasn't. It's been a year, and the spasms are sudden and severe. CT scans are normal, and meds and physical therapy help only a little. What is going on?

A In certain cases of lung cancer, surgery is a treatment option. This may mean removing a small portion of the lung, an entire lobe or the lung itself. Sometimes, surgical targets in the upper chest and abdomen can be reached using minimally invasive procedures. But when that isn't possible, a surgery known as a thoracotomy becomes necessary. It is used when a surgeon needs direct access to an area in the upper or middle chest. It entails

ASK THE DOCTORS



ELIZABETH KO



EVE GLAZIER

making an incision between the ribs, about 6 inches below the shoulder blade. The muscles and ribs are then maneuvered in a way that allows the surgeon to both see and reach the target tissues.

Thoracotomy is a major surgical procedure. In gaining access to the interior of the basketlike structure of the rib cage, the

surgeon cuts through muscle, connective tissues and a complex network of nerves. Known as the intercostal nerves, they radiate throughout the rib cage and abdomen.

While healing from the procedure, patients experience pain, discomfort and tightness at the surgical site, and also often along the ribs and muscles that were moved to create a surgical field. This often lasts for several weeks. For some patients, however, these symptoms persist for many months. This is known as post-thoracotomy pain syndrome. Symptoms can include sensations of itching, prickling, burning or tingling, increased sensitivity to touch or pressure, and pain that can range from dull and throbbing to sharp and sudden.

As has occurred in your case,

some patients experience ongoing tightness and spasms in the muscles of the rib cage and midriff, which can become quite intense. The name for this is intercostal neuralgia. These may be triggered by movement that involves the torso — such as twisting, turning or sneezing — or they may occur spontaneously. The reasons why are not always clear, but damage to the intercostal nerves is believed to play a role. Potential causes include ongoing inflammation, the formation of scar tissue that may pinch or put pressure on the intercostal nerves, or damage to the nerves themselves.

Unfortunately, nerve pain does not respond well to nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories. Other treatment options include the use of neuropathic pain medications, certain antidepressants and pe-

riodic injections of nerve blocks. When a nerve block identifies a specific neural pathway involved in this type of pain, a treatment known as radiofrequency ablation may become an option. It's a procedure that targets specific tissues using the thermal energy produced by radio waves.

Radiofrequency ablation has been used successfully to manage nerve pain in shingles, herpes and back pain. It has also shown promise in managing some cases of intercostal neuralgia. Your doctor will be able to advise you if this may be an option for you.

Eve Glazier, M.D., MBA, is an internist and associate professor of medicine at UCLA Health. Elizabeth Ko, M.D., is an internist and assistant professor of medicine at UCLA Health.

Exercises to relieve hip pain and increase your mobility

BY EBONY WILLIAMS,
Atlanta Journal-Constitution

According to WebMD, over 50% of older adults experience hip or knee pain.

There are many reasons for hip pain and discomfort, including core muscle injury, bursitis, tendonitis, and labral tears. Whatever the cause, most hip pain is a result of inflammation.

"The most common thing that happens when you get older is you can get inflamed bursa," explained Roy I. Davidovitch, MD, in WebMD.

To help eliminate hip pain and take preventative measures regarding your joint health, it's essential to work on strength and flexibility.

"Mobility training is just an important as weight training or cardio," Jill Charton, mobility trainer and founder of iFourLife, told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "It allows your joints to age gracefully, helps with function as we get older, and can improve joint-related health issues."

Here are some low-impact exercises to help relieve hip pain and increase mobility:



ALBINA GAVRILOVIC/
SHUTTERSTOCK

There are many reasons for hip pain and discomfort. Whatever the cause, most hip pain is a result of inflammation.

Lying hip flexor

Some exercises are best done lying down, and that includes the lying hip flexor. Grab your ankle and slightly pull your leg back.

Knee lift

Knee lifts are great for movement and flow. Keep your spine in alignment and slowly lift one leg at a time. If you need extra support, you can brace yourself with a chair or countertop.

Bridging

Lying on your back, recruit your core (suck in your stomach) and slowly lift your hips in the air hold for a few seconds and release slowly to the ground.

3 are killed by bacteria found in brackish water

The Associated Press

RALEIGH — Three North Carolina residents died this month from infections from bacteria naturally found in warm seawater and brackish water, state health officials said Friday.

Cases of *Vibrio* are rare in North Carolina. While healthy people typically develop mild illness, infections can be severe or life-threatening for those with weakened immune systems or chronic liver disease, the Department of Health and Human Services said in a statement.

The bacteria are naturally found in warm waters, meaning people can be exposed when open wounds, cuts or scratches make direct contact with seawater or brackish water. *Vibrio* can also sicken people who eat raw or undercooked oysters and shellfish.

Two of the three deaths

this month involved scratches exposed to brackish water in North Carolina and another East Coast state. The third case also involved exposure to brackish water in North Carolina and the person also consumed personally caught seafood that was not shared or commercially distributed.

No links were identified between the cases and investigations are ongoing, officials said.

About 100 cases of *Vibrio* are reported in the U.S. each year. About a third of reported cases are fatal.

Of 47 *Vibrio* cases among North Carolina residents since 2019, eight have been fatal, health officials said. *Vibrio* infection reports associated with brackish water have increased in recent decades and the range of waters associated with infection has spread north due to increasing water temperatures, officials said.

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