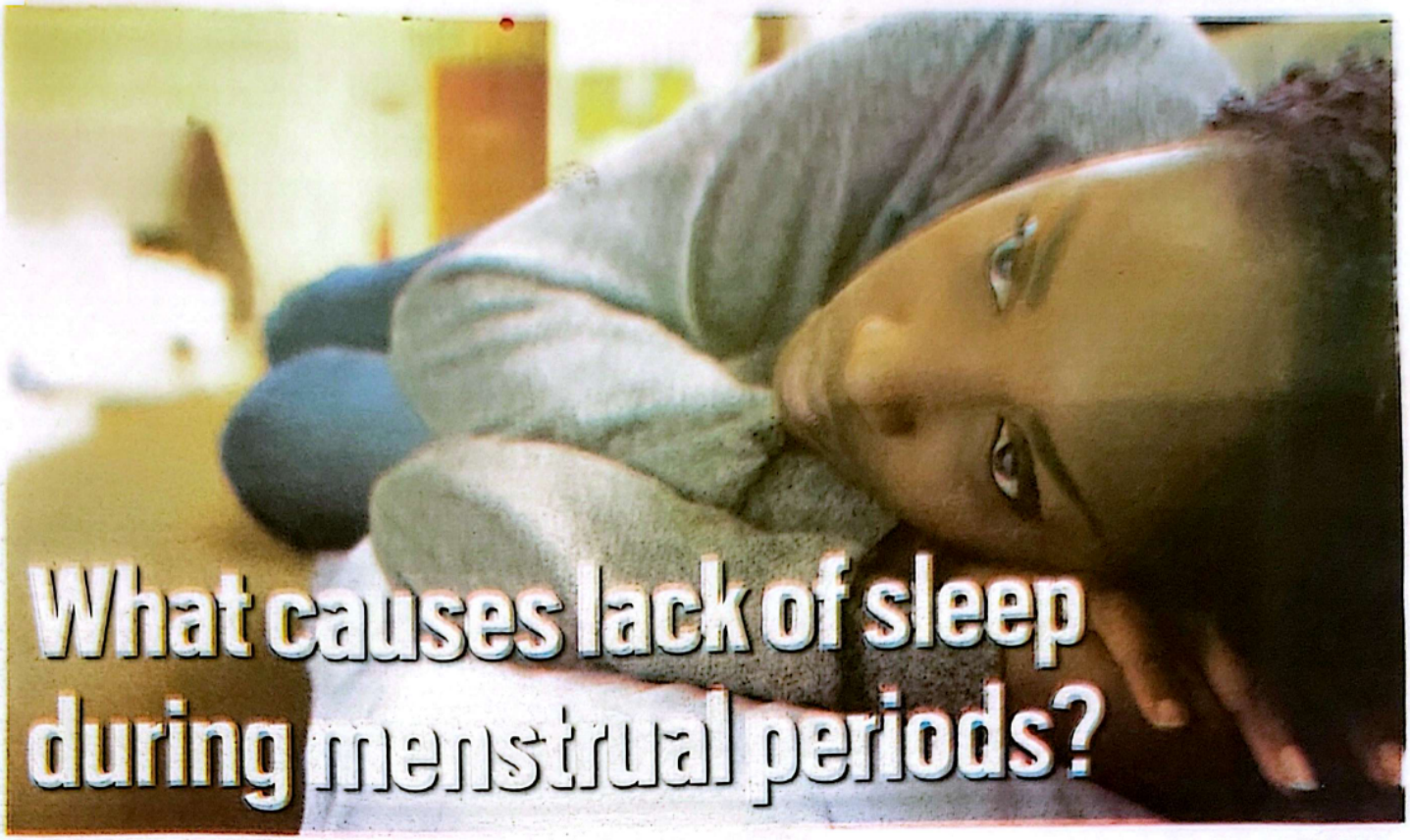


What causes lack of sleep during menstrual periods?

Menstrual period is a time when there are several things happening. A mix of hormones, bodily changes and urges are a recipe for some discomfort. Some of this is in form of sleeplessness, or better known as insomnia. In this case, it is referred as menstrual insomnia. Here is an explanation of how and why it happens as well as tips on what to do and what not to do.

BY CAROL B. ATANGAZA
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

As if the bloating, pains and aches were not enough to make the menstruation period a difficult time, most experience sleeplessness as well.

Dr Phiona Atuhebwe, the Africa and Asia technical advisor for vaccines and immunisation at PATH-Uganda, explains that this is a result of the hormonal changes that take place in the body during this time.

"Your body temperature rises as progesterone levels rise, thus preventing Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep (this is when your brain processes and stores the day's information, usually in the form of dreams).

REM happens when your body temperature is low. Without REM sleep, you tend to be more emotional about things.

Progesterone is a soporific hormone—in other words, it makes you drowsy. If the rise in progesterone isn't high enough then your need to sleep can be affected.

Serotonin levels (which affect your mood) can be lowered as progesterone drops. This brings with it cravings for carbs and sugars, which in turn affect sleep, and the production of any extra serotonin. Low mood then triggers sleep problems.

Melatonin is the hormone that helps you want to sleep, by preparing the body to feel tired; and you will never guess when it is made – yes, you are right, it is made at night whilst sleeping.

The other major cause of menstrual insomnia is the disruption in the sleep schedule. It is not unusual for women to stay in bed longer or take a nap during the day due to cramps or fatigue.

Other health conditions

This means that when your bed time comes you will ordinarily have a sleep deficit. The discomfort makes a bad situation worse.

The best way to avoid this is to stick to your sleep schedule the same time every day—yes, even while your period makes you feel like spending the day in bed.

"Some women may have other health conditions that worsen during their cycle, and any associated sleeplessness may become exaggerated, possibly because of changes in blood volume. When blood volume increases, your blood levels of medication may drop too," says Dr Atuhebwe.

Some women with PMS benefit from light therapy with improved mood, perhaps via its effect on biological rhythms, improved timing of adrenal output, or melatonin release.

Sleep deprivation (sleeping from 3-7 am) seems to normalise circadian rhythms and REM sleep, as well as improve mood during the second half of the menstrual cycle, however this treatment was only studied for short, one-day periods of time.

Selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are also effective in treating PMS.

Period cramps or anxiety can cause you to feel uncomfortable at night and disturb your sleep.

The situation becomes worse when we give in into our cravings for sugar or caffeine during the night or even shortly before bedtime.

Eating a heavy meal too close to your bed time too can cause sleeplessness. When you are premenstrual, your body temperature rises, so if your body has to metabolise heavy food as well, it can increase your temperature further, which can cause you to become too hot to sleep.

Make sure your evening meal is not too heavy or too late, and try to consume fewer refined carbs (for example, white rice, white pasta or sugary foods like cakes and biscuits).

Blood sugar levels can also drop in the lead up.to menstruation due to fluctuating hormones. If you get hungry after dinner have a snack that is not too demanding on your system, but will gently balance your blood sugar levels, such as an oatcake or an unsweetened yoghurt.

Falling iron levels during your period can also take their toll on your quality of sleep. Iron helps to regulate serotonin, so a liquid iron supplement such as Feroglobin or Floradix may be effective. Consumption of alcohol at this time of the month should be avoided as it contributes to lack of sleep.

Remember, during your period your liver is already working hard trying to regulate your body's temperature, without trying to process alcohol as well.

Caffeine found in popular over-the-counter remedies advertised for pain relief during menstruation like aspirin also interferes with your sleep.

You might want to avoid over-the-counter drugs with antihistamines added in as well, especially those that have Benadryl.

How can one beat menstrual insomnia?

For most women who are used to a full night's sleep insomnia can result in fatigue, failure to concentrate at any task and general irritability. The best way to beat insomnia is exercising.

"Exercise helps to block the chemicals that produce pain, promote deep-sleep stages, the kind of restorative sleep where growth hormone, necessary for cell repair and regeneration, is secreted," advises Dr Atuhebwe.

Avoid alcohol. Progesterone is highest around ovulation and during the luteal phase, which can exacerbate the effects of alcohol (or any other central-nervous system depressant).

Though having a glass of wine in the evening may induce sleepiness, drinking alcohol at night can cause wakefulness and fragmented sleep.

Studies suggest that women who use oral contraceptives have less cycle-related insomnia.

You should discuss the possibility of switching to oral contraceptives with your doctor if you regularly suffer from this monthly sleeplessness.

Menstruating women sometimes get so hungry they tend to eat every couple of hours.

If you are hungry close to bedtime, however, just take a bite or two of something light, like a cracker.

"If you experience severe pelvic pain during your period, take anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen, plus a vitamin B complex and magnesium supplement. And don't forget the old remedies of a heating pad or sex to relieve the pain," concludes Dr Atuhebwe.

4

THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS THE MENSES PHASE LASTS

CamScanner