

Leicestershire Adult Eating Disorders Service

Health problems resulting from eating disorders

MENSTRUAL DISTURBANCE

This leaflet provides information for patients about menstrual disturbances that may result from having an eating disorder.

The aim of this leaflet to provide you with information that is important to you, not to worry you or upset you. The information in this leaflet may raise questions to discuss with your doctor or therapist. It may help to explain why you may need certain blood tests or other investigations.

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Menstrual disturbance

Menstrual disturbance can include

- Periods stopping
- Periods becoming less frequent, irregular or lighter
- Periods not starting in adolescence

Menstrual disturbance can occur for lots of reasons, but for patients of this service, it is likely to be related to an eating disorder. For example:

- If eating patterns are irregular, due to periods of starvation, bingeing or vomiting, then periods may become less frequent, irregular or lighter.
- If there is a lot of weight loss, then periods may stop altogether. This is known as **amenorrhoea**.
- Sometimes over-exercise can cause menstrual disturbance.

Health problems caused by menstrual disturbance

1. Osteoporosis

This is thinning of the bones, which is a particular risk in amenorrhoea, and can lead in the longer term to fractures. We have a separate information leaflet on osteoporosis which gives more information about this problem and how it might be managed. Please ask for this if needed.

2. Fertility

The reproductive system is very sensitive to changes in the body. This is essentially mother nature's way of ensuring that pregnancy does not occur unless you are healthy enough. Irregular periods and amenorrhoea can obviously impact on fertility in the short-term**. For most women, fertility returns to normal when the eating disorder resolves, and the body returns to a normal weight. However, for

some, fertility problems can persist and there is some evidence that patients who have or have had an eating disorder are at higher risk of complications during pregnancy and birth.

3. Puberty and growth

In children and adolescents, the usual changes of puberty cannot occur and growth may be permanently stunted.

4. Sexual function

For both men and women, a lowering of sex hormones can reduce libido, and in men there can be problems with impotence.

Recovery and restoration of the menstrual cycle

For most patients, these problems will resolve after weight restoration, but it may take some months for regular periods to return. However, if after six months of recovery, the periods do not resume normally, then we suggest a consultation with the GP.

The oral contraceptive pill / patch

If you are taking the oral contraceptive pill / or patch, you may not notice the changes to your usual pattern of periods. However, the pill does not particularly reduce the risk of the health problems.

****Please remember that absent or irregular periods are no guarantee against getting pregnant. You should still take the usual contraceptive precautions to avoid an unwanted pregnancy.**

If you have any questions or concerns about the information in this leaflet you can raise these with your doctor or therapist or leave a message with our secretaries on 0116 225 2557