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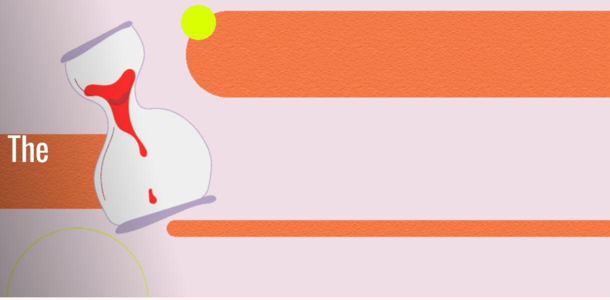
Is there any way to shorten your period? The verdict



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How to safely reduce the length of your period

TL;DR: *Studies show that hormonal birth control is the most effective way to control your period. However, if you need to kick bleeding to the curb ASAP, you can also try getting some exercise, having an orgasm, taking some Advil, or incorporating herbs like fennel and ginger into your diet.*

Behold the mighty interrupter of romantic beach baecations and cute white outfits: The Ill-Timed Period. Even if your period isn't killing the vibe at major life events (a cute white outfit *is* a major life event, okay!?), it might just be extra heavy and uncomfortable. Chocolate and a heating pad can only do so much.

Luckily, there are a few ways, both scientifically proven and science-ish-yet-widespread, to shorten your period. Yup, you heard that right. And we're talking simple, quick hacks—not crazy multi-step strategies, weird diets, or prayers to an ancient goddess.

Read on to learn how to kick your period to the curb a little sooner so you can enjoy that date night, wedding, or concert menstruation-free.

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A few scientifically proven ways to speed up your period:

Believe it or not, there are a few studies out there that have found that stopping your period early – or even delaying it for a few days – is totally possible. However, not all of these methods are suitable for everyone. Speak with your doctor or OB-GYN if you have any concerns about the length of your period or if it's suddenly become crazy heavy.

Caveats aside, here are a few scientifically proven ways to shorten your period:

Sweat it out

Your period is no longer an excuse to skip the gym. Turns out, physical exercise may not only make your period less painful, but also has the potential to decrease its duration by about a quarter of a day, according to a study published in medical journal *Epidemiology*.[1] Cardiovascular exercise, in particular, has been shown to reduce pain associated with menstrual cramps and may help uterine blood exit the body a little faster.[2]

Exercise also reduces excess water content in your body, which helps with bloating, that oh-so-fun reason you hate wearing jeans during your period. And full-body workouts improve circulation and blood flow over time, especially if you keep your exercise routine regular (even a 30-minute outdoor walk or moderate yoga session totally counts). In general, several studies have shown that exercise reduces PMS symptoms and makes your period a little less uncomfortable, no matter what routine you choose.[3]

Endorphins are helpful, too: Their natural pain-killing effect can even decrease period cramp discomfort.[4] Moderate intensity exercise is the best way to ride that endorphin high – so go for a low key, 30-minute jog, swim some laps, hop on a spin bike for an easy 5 or 6 miles, or take a hike with a friend. Aim to work out for at least 30 minutes per day to maximize endorphin production, but don't overdo it. Listen to your body and take a break if the activity you're doing is making period pain worse.

Hormonal birth control FTW

Studies have shown that hormonal birth control is perhaps the most reliable method for changing or controlling the menstrual cycle – including the average duration of your period.[5] The combined contraceptive pill, for example, controls the menstrual cycle by impacting hormone levels and "tricking" your body into thinking you're already pregnant (thus, no period).

Most combined hormonal birth control pill packs include 3 – 3.5 weeks of "active" pills that contain small amounts of synthetic estrogen and progesterone and 4 – 7 days of placebo pills with no active ingredients. When taking the placebo pills, most individuals will get a period (a.k.a. breakthrough bleeding) as the hormone levels in your body shift.

In most cases, however, placebo pills can be skipped. So, rather than taking the placebo pills at the end of the pack, you just grab a new pack and stay on the active pills.[6] By skipping placebo pills, hormone levels stay consistent and you avoid breakthrough bleeding (i.e. your period).

For most individuals, it's totally safe to skip placebo pills as often as you like – but make sure to check with your healthcare provider to confirm before you go rogue. Also, keep in mind that there are many different types of hormonal birth control pills. Some are designed so that breakthrough bleeding is avoided altogether! Other types of contraceptive pills change hormone levels throughout the month; for these, it's best to have a longer chat with your provider before you make changes.

There are other forms of non-pill hormonal birth control, like the Depo-Provera shot and progestin IUDs, that may stop your period completely.[7] If you're thinking about switching up your contraceptive method, do some research first and have a convo with your doctor or OB-GYN. You may have to test out a few options before you find one that effectively lightens or shortens your period.

NSAIDs – But proceed with caution

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like good ol' Advil, Motrin, or Aleve can actually lend a hand in slowing down your period. Why? Because NSAIDs reduce the production of prostaglandins, the chemicals that trigger your uterus to contract and shed its lining each month during your period. This means that taking NSAIDS will often result in a lighter flow with less pain – great news for when the stars (fail to) align and you have your period during that beach vacation you've been planning forever.

Turns out, NSAIDs do more than just ease pain: There is some evidence that, at extremely high doses, NSAIDS can even delay your period for a day or two or make it end sooner than usual.[8]

However: Before you run to the medicine cabinet, keep in mind that stopping your period would require a *much* higher dose of NSAIDs than is recommended on the bottle: About 800 milligrams of ibuprofen, every six hours, or 500 milligrams of naproxen, three times a day.[8] NSAIDs can have a harmful effect on your health and can even be toxic to your liver and kidney at such high levels, so many physicians recommend *against* using these meds as a period shortener.

If the main reason you want your period to end is because you're dealing with god-awful period cramps, NSAIDs can be very effective when taken at their normal, packaging-recommended dosage. Studies have shown that these drugs are effective for dysmenorrhea because they inhibit cyclooxygenase enzymes (which make prostaglandins) and reduce the volume of menstrual blood – plus, they may have an analgesic (fancy word for pain-relieving) effect on the central nervous system.[9]

Bottom line, always make sure you're within daily limits for any meds you're on, whether they're OTC or prescribed, and ask your doc if you have any questions (especially if you have any pre-existing conditions). But in general, NSAIDs = helpful for cramps and flow. Note: Tylenol (acetaminophen) is NOT an NSAID, so stick with ibuprofen or naproxen.

Not-so-scientifically-proven options that *might* shorten your period

Alright, enough with the studies. If you're desperate to stop your period, like, yesterday and are willing to try anything at all, have a go at some of these (purely hypothetical) ways to escort your flow out the door.

- **Have an orgasm:** Having an orgasm, whether through sex or masturbation, isn't just a good idea in general—it could potentially shorten your period.[10] An orgasm is pretty similar to the muscle contractions in the uterus that dispel menstrual blood. Even though there isn't a ton of scientific research to back this up, it doesn't hurt to try! Say a quick prayer to the period goddesses, break out that vibrator, and see what happens. Trying to avoid a mess? Pop in a Flex Disc™ just before penetrative sex (or dildo play). It's basically a win-win.

- **Vitamin C:** Vitamin C isn't just good for colds. This water-soluble vitamin *allegedly* increases progesterone levels, helping to break down your uterine lining more quickly and potentially shortening your period.[11] Its immune-boosting benefits can't hurt, either, especially if you're already feeling stressed. Buy it in capsule, gummy, or powder form or consume it naturally in citrus fruits, strawberries, bell peppers, or broccoli.

- **Herbal remedies:** Whether you enjoy them in a supplement, tea, or tossed right in your favorite homemade soup, herbs are great for supporting your wellness in general – and a few of them may shorten your period. Fennel, for one, has analgesic and anti-inflammatory properties that can decrease the length of blood flow during your period.[12] Chamomile may also decrease your average amount of bleeding per cycle (and its soothing, sleep-inducing qualities can help you catch some Zs).[13] Lastly, ginger has been recommended by some practitioners to reduce heavy menstrual flow.[14]

- **Avoid using tampons:** Tampons soak up menstrual blood while sitting in the vaginal canal, rather than collecting it. This absorbing action may interfere with your flow, making your period feel as though it lasts longer than it should. A menstrual cup or disc, on the other hand, relies on gravity to catch period blood. Some believe that this "free bleeding" effect makes your period move a little quicker. Plus, with a cup or disc, you won't have to take trips to the restroom as frequently for a change (thanks to 12-hour wear), so you may even forget about your period altogether!

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The bottom line

We get it. We wish we could control when your period comes and goes, or if it even comes at all. Managing stress, exercising, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle can lead to shorter periods overall, but it's comforting to know there are a few options to try when we're in a pinch. You can try taking vitamins, going for a jog, having sex or masturbating, or switching up your period product game for a short and sweet menstrual flow.

As always, if you're experiencing way heavier or more painful periods than usual, make an appointment with your doctor to rule out any potential problems.

This article is informational only and is not offered as medical advice, nor does it substitute for a consultation with your physician. If you have any *gynecological/medical concerns or conditions, please consult your physician.*

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