

NAME: chukwurah sinead ifeoma

Dept:nursing

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CYCLIC CHANGE IN THE BREAST

Each month, women go through changes in the hormones that make up the normal menstrual cycle. The hormone estrogen is produced by the ovaries in the first half of the menstrual cycle. It stimulates the growth of milk ducts in the breasts. The increasing level of estrogen leads to ovulation halfway through the cycle. Next, the hormone progesterone takes over in the second half of the cycle. It stimulates the formation of the milk glands. These hormones are believed to be responsible for the cyclical changes that many women feel in their breasts just before menstruation. These include swelling, pain, and soreness.

During menstruation, many women also have changes in breast texture. Their breasts may feel very lumpy. This is because the glands in the breast are enlarging to get ready for a possible pregnancy. If pregnancy

does not happen, the breasts go back to normal size. Once menstruation starts, the cycle begins again.

VAGINA

Studies in nonhuman primates indicate that changes in the thickness and integrity of the vaginal epithelium affect the transmission rates of HIV-1, but few studies have examined the normal variations that may occur in the vagina of normal macaques as a result of aging or changes in the menstrual cycle. This study was conducted to determine if differences occur in the thickness of the vaginal mucosa with age or menses. Vaginal mucosal thickness was compared in 46 rhesus macaques grouped as juvenile (1-3 years old), mature cycling (3-21 years old), and geriatric (> 21 years old). Epithelia of mature cycling macaques were also compared at different stages of the menstrual cycle. Older females (> 21 years) had the thinnest and least keratinized epithelium of all groups, followed by the youngest females (< 3 years). The vaginal epithelium was also thinner in cycling macaques during menses compared to the follicular stage. In addition, young, geriatric, or cycling macaques during menses had

minimal keratinization. We hypothesize that normal physiologic changes in the vaginal epithelium of women occur with age and menses, which may affect a woman's susceptibility to HIV-1 transmission and other sexually transmitted diseases. Also, age and menstrual cycle should be considered when designing vaginal transmission experiments in rhesus macaques.

MENSTRUAL CYCLE

Everyone (adolescent boys and girls) who is about to enter puberty (the process of body changes that cause a child's body to become an adult body capable of reproduction) should be taught or know the basic medical definition of menstruation and that it is a normal process that females go through as their bodies prepare themselves for potential pregnancy. It is a part of the monthly menstrual cycle (regular cycling of hormones) that occur in the female reproductive system that makes pregnancy possible.

Medically, menstruation (also termed period or bleeding) is the process in a woman of discharging (through the vagina) blood and other materials from the lining of the uterus at about one monthly interval

from puberty until menopause (ceasing of regular menstrual cycles), except during pregnancy. This discharging process lasts about 3-5 days.

What are the signs and symptoms of menstruation?

Beside the bleeding, other signs and symptoms of menstruation may include headache, acne, bloating, pains in the low abdomen, tiredness, mood changes, food cravings, breast soreness, and diarrhea.

When does menstruation begin? When does it end?

The menstrual cycle is the hormonal driven cycle; Day 1 is the first day of your period (bleeding) while day 14 is the approximate day you ovulate and if an egg is not fertilized, hormone levels eventually drop and at about day 25; the egg begins to dissolve and the cycle begins again with the period at about day 30.

Menstruation begins day 1 and normally ends days 3-5 of the menstrual cycle.

At what age do girls go through puberty and begin and start their period (begin to menstruate)?

The average age for a girl to get her first period in the US is 12, but the range of age is about 8 to 15 years old. Women usually have periods until about ages 45 to 55.

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How long does a period last?

The menstrual cycle is the hormonal driven cycle. Day 1 is the first day of your period (bleeding) while day 14 is the approximate day you ovulate and if an egg is not fertilized, hormone levels eventually drop and at about day 25. The egg then begins to dissolve and the cycle begins again with the period at about day 30. Most periods vary somewhat, the flow may be light, moderate or heavy and can vary in length from about 2 to 7 days; with age, the cycle usually shortens and becomes more regular.

Stages

Each month during the years between puberty and menopause, a woman's body goes through a number of changes to get it ready for a possible pregnancy. This series of hormone-driven events is called the menstrual cycle.

During each menstrual cycle, an egg develops and is released from the ovaries. The lining of the uterus builds up. If a pregnancy doesn't happen, the uterine lining sheds during a menstrual period. Then the cycle starts again.

A woman's menstrual cycle is divided into four phases:

menstrual phase

follicular phase

ovulation phase

luteal phase

The length of each phase can differ from woman to woman, and it can change over time.