How Do I Know If I’m Pregnant?

The first indication that a woman might be pregnant is often a missed menstrual period. Home pregnancy test kits are available in most drug stores and many supermarkets and can help determine if you are pregnant. Sometimes, however, these tests might not be able to detect pregnancy if performed on the first day of a missed period. An article in the October 10, 2001, issue of JAMA discusses the use of pregnancy testing in the first week after a missed period.

**POSSIBLE CAUSES OF A MISSED PERIOD**

- Pregnancy is the most common cause of a missed period.
- Birth control pills—some women who use this form of contraception may not have periods. When you stop taking birth control pills, it can also lead to 3 to 6 months of missed or abnormal periods.
- Breastfeeding can cause missed periods, but you may still get pregnant without periods when you are breastfeeding.
- Certain medications can cause changes in your menstrual cycle. Check with your physician about changes if you are taking a new medication.
- Some illnesses can postpone your period; it will usually resume its normal cycle when you are healthy.
- Malnutrition and low body weight (possible results of poor eating habits) can cause disruptions in your cycle.
- Excessive exercise can disrupt the production of hormones in your body and stop menstruation.
- As menopause approaches, periods become irregular and eventually stop. See your doctor to evaluate changes in your menstrual cycle.

**INFORM YOURSELF**

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Sources: American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mayo Clinic, National Institutes of Health

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