

Starting periods before the age of 10 increases risk of lung complaints in future

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Women who suffer from asthma or poor lung function as adults generally started their periods at the age of 10 or before. Credit: SINC

Women who suffer from asthma or poor lung function as adults generally started their periods at the age of 10 or before. This is the conclusion of a European research study with Spanish participation, which shows that this trend is more common in southern Europe, and particularly affects women from large families.

"Adult [women](#) who had their first menstruation at the age of 10 or earlier have significantly lower lung capacity than women who had their first period at 13", Ferenc Macsali, lead author of the study and a researcher at the Haukeland Hospital in Bergen (Norway), tells SINC.

The experts discovered that women who underwent early menarche (first

menstruation) suffer more frequently from asthma, suggesting that metabolic and hormonal factors have an impact on the respiratory system. In addition, these girls tend to be smaller in stature and have higher levels of body fat than other girls their age.

The study, carried out on 3,354 women aged between 27 and 55, is part of a multi-centre study called the European Community Respiratory Health Survey (ECRHS). The countries that took part were Spain, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States, Belgium, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and Estonia.

According to the study, published in the [American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine](#), early menstruation is more common in southern Europe and primarily affects women from large families. Smoking is also related to the onset of menstruation, since women who smoke tended to have their first period at the age of 10 or before.

As a preventive measure, the researchers recommend monitoring the symptoms of asthma in these girls more carefully and setting up a smoking-prevention programme that would also include early menstruation as a risk indicator.

Low birth weight

"The link between lower [lung function](#), asthma and early menarche goes back to birth", the expert explains. Other studies have shown that many women who experienced early menstruation had a [low birth weight](#).

"This unfavourable intrauterine environment is possibly related to poor foetal lung development, which will affect this person over their whole life", he adds.

Despite their low initial weight, many women become overweight as

adults due to a faster increase in body mass during early adolescence.

Various studies over recent years have also shown that improved living conditions in western countries have led to children weighing more and maturing earlier. This trend also has an impact on girls having their first period at ever earlier ages.

More information: Ferenc Macsali, Francisco Gómez Real, Estel Plana, Jordi Sunyer, Josep Anto, Julia Dratva, Christer Janson, Deborah Jarvis, Ernst Reidar Omenaas, Elisabeth Zemp, Matthias Wjst, Benedicte Leynaert, y Cecilie Svanes. "Early Age at Menarche, Lung Function, and Adult Asthma". American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine. 183, enero de 2011. [Doi: 10.1164/rccm.200912-1886OC](https://doi.org/10.1164/rccm.200912-1886OC)

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