

Study finds that stress of the COVID pandemic caused irregular menstrual cycles

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Women and people who menstruate experienced irregularities in their menstrual cycle because of increased stress during the COVID-19 pandemic, a new Northwestern Medicine study has found.

This is the first U.S. study to evaluate the impact of stress on people's [periods](#).

The study surveyed more than 200 women and people who menstruate in the United States between July and August 2020 in order to better understand how stress during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their menstrual cycles. More than half (54%) of the individuals in the study experienced changes in their menstrual cycle following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

Individuals who experienced higher levels of stress during the COVID-19 pandemic were more likely to experience heavier menstrual bleeding and a longer duration of their period, compared to individuals with moderate stress levels, the study found.

The study, "Impact of Stress on Menstrual Cyclicity During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Survey Study," was published Sept. 28 in the *Journal of Women's Health*. It provides a better understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted women's mental and reproductive health, the study authors said.

"We know added stress can negatively impact our overall health and well-being, but for women and people who menstruate, [stress](#) can also disrupt normal menstrual cycle patterns and overall reproductive health," said lead and corresponding author Nicole Voitowich, research assistant professor of medical social sciences at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

Prior research has found that menstrual cycle irregularities are often reported by women who experience mood disorders such as anxiety and depression, or by those who are facing acute life stressors such as natural disasters, displacement, famine or defection.

"Given the unprecedented nature of the pandemic and its significant impact on mental health, this data is unsurprising and confirms many anecdotal reports in the popular press and on social media," Woitowich said.

Since the onset of the pandemic, social media has been one of the major platforms where women and people who menstruate could share questions or concerns about their [menstrual cycles](#). Only recently have these concerns been addressed by the biomedical research community.

"Reproductive health should not be ignored in the context of COVID-19," Woitowich said. "We are already seeing the ripple effects of what happens when we fail to consider this important facet of women's health as many are now experiencing menstrual cycle irregularities as a result of the COVID-19 vaccines or COVID-19 infection."

Other Northwestern co-authors include Dr. Kara Goldman, associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology (reproductive endocrinology and infertility) at Feinberg, and former Feinberg students Noelle Ozimek, Karen Velez, Hannah Anvari and Lauren Butler.

More information: Noelle Ozimek et al, Impact of Stress on Menstrual Cyclicity During the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Survey Study, *Journal of Women's Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1089/jwh.2021.0158](https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2021.0158)

Provided by Northwestern University

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