Women With Erratic Menstrual Cycles Face Higher Mortality Rates

Periods lasting 40 days or more versus 26 to 31 days were associated with early death among women in certain age groups.

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Lengthy and irregular menstrual cycles are linked with an elevated risk of many chronic illnesses. Now, new findings published in the medical journal BMJ suggest that women who experience inconsistent menstrual cycles have a higher risk of dying prematurely (before age 70) than women with regular cycles, CNN reports.

For the study, researchers assessed 79,505 women with no history of heart disease, cancer or diabetes. Participants reported the usual length and regularity of their periods between ages 14 to 17, 18 to 22 and 29 to 46.

Results showed that women whose cycles lasted 40 days or more in the latter two groups faced a greater risk of death before 70, compared with their counterparts in the same age bracket whose cycles lasted 26 to 31 days. (The women who died were also more likely to die of cardiovascular disease than cancer or other causes.)

However, experts stressed that these findings shouldn't be a cause for concern, as irregular periods are more than likely to be a symptom not a diagnosis.

The big takeaway, according to researchers, is that menstrual patterns and reproductive health are vital signs of women's overall wellness during different biological phases of their lives.

"Young women with irregular periods need a thorough assessment not only of their hormones and metabolism but also of their lifestyle so that they can be advised about steps that they can take which might enhance their overall health," said Adam Balen, MD, a professor of reproductive Medicine at Leeds Teaching Hospitals in England and the reproductive medicine spokesperson for the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, who wasn't involved in the inquiry.

For related coverage, read "Early Puberty in Girls Increases Adult Breast Cancer Risk. Here's Why."

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