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**Kotex explores exam stress effect on a woman’s menstrual cycle**

We all tend to be a little bit more anxious towards the end of the year when exam time rolls around with nerves on edge and anxiety that can give you uncomfortable knots in your stomach.

If your uncapped stress is not monitored, this can cause more serious problems like headaches, irritability, constipation or diarrhea, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, even high blood pressure. All of these symptoms could inevitably interfere with menstrual cycles; causing either irregular, delayed or missed periods.

*“Serious stress that becomes distress interferes with many of the body’s systems, and the first to be affected is the reproductive system. Periods may be affected because the menstrual cycle works on a fine balance of hormones, mainly oestrogen and progesterone which can be drastically reduced due to high stress levels,”* says Sister Burgie, advisory nursing sister and midwife for Kotex®.

Normal stress is not too bad for our bodies, in fact, during exam time, a little bit of stress can be helpful because it motivates students to move out of their comfort zone and do something about passing their exams.

**Is it important to see a doctor if I experience these symptoms?**

If a woman recognises that stress is causing havoc with her periods, she should first take steps to control or minimise her stress levels. Doctors and clinics are quick to mask underlying symptoms by prescribing the contraceptive pill for the sake of having ‘regular periods’, however, it’s best for young growing bodies to try and eliminate stress through natural remedies and relaxation techniques such as slowing down, taking a bubble bath with soothing bath oils and scented candles, doing an activity that you enjoy such as watching your favourite movie, baking or even pampering yourself and getting a massage.

**Should it be something one should be worried about?**

Stress that interferes with menstrual cycles should not be ignored. If left unchecked it could become distress, burnout, breakdown, depression or even panic attacks. Sister Burgie informs, *“Taking control of stress can be as simple as having regular walks, going to dance classes or joining a social club, drinking less coffee and improving one’s diet”.*

A homeopath or herbalist can prescribe natural medication, and a doctor is more likely to prescribe anti-anxiety medication or antidepressants. Although it’s important to note that the two cannot be used together. A helpful pharmacist can suggest over-the-counter multivitamins, tonics, natural mood enhancers or homeopathic drops that can help relieve the symptoms of stress.

**How can I avoid this severe stress that could change/affect ones menstrual cycle?**

Learning to deal with stress can be a helpful tool for life because stress is inevitable and unavoidable. While some women deal well with stress and manage to laugh it off, others struggle and this can undermine their confidence.

Ways to avoid exam stress:

* Set realistic goals and prioritize what’s important
* It’s all about **ATTITUDE**:
* A – Attitude: exams are an opportunity to prove what you know, not to test what you don’t know
* T – Time management: be organized, make lists, schedule daily activities
* T – Take time out: When studying, give yourself short, frequent breaks
* I – Identify the cause of stress and do something about it e.g. relationships, procrastination, poor time management, over commitment, financial mismanagement
* T – make study TIMETABLES
* U – Understand your personality and acknowledge what causes you to stress
* D – Pay attention to your DIET. Cut fried carbs, fatty foods and calories – eat only fresh fruit and vegetables. Avoid carbonated cold drinks, caffeine and alcohol
* E – Exercise and create a peaceful ENVIRONMENT e.g. study at the library where it’s quiet and you won’t be disturbed.

Kotex® is there for you when you feel the stress of exam time. Feel free and comfortable to ask Sister Burgie any questions concerning your health, your stress levels during exams and anything related to being a woman. Join the discussion and share your thoughts, concerns and views on the Kotex® Mxit app and Kotex Facebook page.

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**About Kotex**

Kotex is all about you. We’re about keeping you, and millions of other women around the world, protected with reliable products that are designed with your needs in mind.

We’re about giving each and every woman the freedom and confidence they deserve to live their lives and enjoy every moment.

We’ve dedicated the past 90 years towards teaching women about their bodies, their periods and everything else in between.

We’re not afraid to get real and we want to get real with you. We want to talk openly and help you feel good about yourself.

**About Sister Burgie Ireland**

Sister Burgie is a mother and a midwife. She is also a writer and Healthcare Educator. Sister Burgie started ‘Just-1-Teenager’ in an effort to reduce teenage pregnancy, HIV and STI’s amongst the youth of South Africa.