Dear Alice,

My boyfriend goes to another school, and will be visiting me soon. Unfortunately, I'll get my period the day before he arrives. Is there any way to make your period shorter? I have heard about menstrual extraction, but I don't know if that's an option. If such a thing exists, is it available to anyone, or do you need a prescription? Please write soon and let me know.

Signed,
Not in the mood for Kotex

Answer

Dear Not in the mood for Kotex,

Two's company but three's a crowd when Aunt Flo comes to town at the same time as your boyfriend. Some women may find it annoying and/or cumbersome to have their periods while spending time with an intimate partner for a variety of personal reasons. Various contraceptive methods, including birth control pills, require a prescription and are commonly used to regulate and/or suppress menstrual cycles. However, should you decide to skip this month's period, it is best to consult a health care provider beforehand.

Using birth control pills to affect the menstrual cycle may be accomplished in a number of ways. As with nearly most medical treatments, there are both pros and cons of menstrual suppression. Benefits include reduced symptoms associated with menstruation, such as pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS), irregular periods, and acne. Drawbacks include not being able to tell whether you're pregnant, breakthrough bleeding that occurs unexpectedly, and/or feeling uncomfortable or unnatural suppressing menstruation. Remember, individual factors may also affect how women respond to different treatment options.

If you are taking oral contraceptives (OC), modifying your OC regimen can work for period suppression. If you're on a 28-day oral contraceptive regimen, when you reach the end of the active hormonal pills in a pack (the first 21 or 24 pills), you can begin the next set of active pills. Skipping the inactive, placebo pills from the previous package can help keep your period at bay. If you are taking the extended regimen birth control pill, active pills are always taken for three months (during which time women do not menstruate). In addition, different types of birth control methods typically put periods on hold for longer amounts of time. These include:

- **The Patch** or **The NuvaRing**: Each of these contraceptives can be used on schedules that prevent menstruation for three months or more.
• **Depo-Provera** [5]: Many women who use this method stop having withdrawal bleeding as a side benefit of the method—50% with one year of use, 90% with two years of use.

• **Intrauterine Device (IUD)** [6]: This method significantly reduces the amount of monthly withdrawal bleeding (by 80-90%). And about 20% of women stop having any withdrawal bleeding after 1 year of use.

• **Implanon** [7]: One-fifth of women don’t experience withdrawal bleeding during any three-month period on this method.

The technique that you mentioned, menstrual extraction (also called manual vacuum aspiration, or MVA) involves extracting contents of the uterus with a suction device or syringe. Now that the birth control pill can be used for suppressing menstrual periods, this MVA technique is available for abortions only.

You seem to feel uncomfortable with having your period when your boyfriend is visiting you. Have you considered the reasons for why you may feel this way? In addition, have you discussed this matter with your boyfriend? You may want to consider having an honest discussion with your boyfriend about your menstrual cycle and your particular feelings about menstruating when he comes to visit. You both may learn something new about each other through these discussions. Furthermore, you may want to consider whether you would feel more comfortable with alternative forms of feminine hygiene, such as tampons and/or menstrual cups [8].

A health care provider can help you navigate the various options available to you. If you are a student at Columbia, you can make an appointment with a primary care provider from Medical Services [9] (Morningside campus) by calling 212-854-2284 or by logging in to Open Communicator [10]. CUMC campus students can contact the Student Health Service [11]. For more information, you can also check out the related Q&As below. Being informed and speaking with a health care provider can help you make the choice that’s best for you.

Alice!
Category:
Sexual & Reproductive Health [12]
Contraception [13]
Women’s Sexual Health [14]

**Related questions**

- Woman’s menstrual cycle [15]
- Can I reschedule my period? [16]
- What are the differences among birth control pills? [17]
- Taking birth control pills? what counts as the "same time" every day? [18]
- Why do I menstruate while on birth control? [19]

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