Dear Alice,

My period is late this month, and I'm afraid that I may be pregnant. The weird thing is, though, my partner and I never actually had actual sexual intercourse (in other words, there was no penetration). I'm wondering if the wet environment could still be a risk. I'm hoping that it's due to stress and fatigue with finals coming on that causing this delay. How long should I wait before getting tested?

--Extra worry

Answer

Dear Extra worry,

Fortunately for you, it's likely that Aunt Flo simply got stuck in traffic. Pregnancy without intercourse is extremely unlikely (unless you're counting on an immaculate conception). The length of your menstrual cycle can vary from twenty to thirty six days, and there are a number of reasons why your period could be late. For example:

- **Stress or trauma** from school, your personal life, or even just a hectic schedule can lead to a change in hormones. This may throw your period off its regular course.
- **Intense exercise** can affect your hormone production, and thereby interfere with what date you get your period.
- **Travel**, particularly when it involves jet lag, can certainly contribute to ?period lag.? Have you been spanning time zones lately, such as flying home or back to school?
- **Being underweight or overweight** can cause major hormonal shifts and lead to an irregular period schedule.
- **An illness**, such as the flu or common cold, can contribute to a missed period. There? another reason to stay healthy during finals season!
- **Taking medications** often comes with different side effects. For example, missing a period is common for women who begin taking oral contraceptive pills.

In your situation, patience is key! However, if you still find yourself anxious about pregnancy, pregnancy tests can be used as early as 24 hours after a missed period. You can administer one yourself by buying a home pregnancy test in a local drug store, or in a medical office with
a health care provider. Pregnancy tests done in a professional environment are generally more accurate.

Thanks,

Alice!

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Sexual & Reproductive Health
Reproduction
Fertility
Pregnancy
Women's Sexual Health

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Published date:
Dec 31, 1969
Last reviewed on:
Jul 08, 2015

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