

**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF BIOTECHNOLOGY IN  
COLLABORATION WITH SOOTHE HEALTHCARE  
PUBLISHED A REVIEW ARTICLE  
"RELATION BETWEEN POOR  
MENSTRUAL PRACTICES  
AND CERVICAL CANCER"  
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PROJECT IN-CHARGE WITH IIBT**



## **Facts about Menstruation**

Menstruation is a natural and physiological process. It's not a disease! It's rather a sign that a woman is healthy!

Girls start to menstruate between the ages of 10-15 years, once every 21-34 days until menopause that occurs between the ages of late 40s and early 50s. Each period lasts from 2 to 7 days and it is believed that the Average duration of menstruation is about 2,100days (almost six years of life)

There are an umpteen taboos and myths out there in the society, pertaining to menstruation. Some people are even accustomed to believing that the menstrual blood is dirty, unclean or unhygienic. A few traditional Practices followed during Menstruation could have caused embarrassment and a few others could have even led to loss of self esteem. It is very important to follow proper menstrual hygienic practices

## **Consequences of unhealthy menstrual practices**

Poor menstrual hygiene can cause fungal infections, Reproductive Tract Infection and Urinary Tract Infection which might lead to cervical cancer. Women who practice unhygienic practices are also vulnerable to infertility.

## **Cervical cancer**

Cervical cancer is the cancer of the mouth of the uterus caused by a virus called Human Papillomavirus (HPV). Major causes of cervical cancer are those pertaining to

- Early sexual debut,
- Multiple sexual partners,
- Poor Menstrual hygiene and
- Unprotected sex.

## Prevalence of Cervical cancer in India

Cervical cancer kills around 72,000 women in India every year, more than 26% of the 275,000 deaths worldwide, says the report by the Cervical Cancer Free Coalition (May 2013) Cervical cancer is common among women worldwide. It kills more women in India than anywhere else in the world. India women die from cervical cancer than women of any other country, according to a new report that warns deaths from this preventable disease will rise unless attitudes to women change.

## Relation between poor menstrual practices and cervical cancer

Hygiene-related practices of women during menstruation are considered important because it can increase vulnerability to Reproductive Tract Infections (RTI's). Most of the adolescent girls in villages use rags and old clothes during menstruation, increasing susceptibility to RTI's. Poor menstrual hygiene is one of the major reasons for the high prevalence of RTIs in the country and contributes significantly to female morbidity.

Poor menstrual hygiene in developing countries has been an insufficiently acknowledged problem. In June 2010, The Indian Government proposed a new scheme towards menstrual hygiene – provision of subsidized sanitary napkin to rural adolescent girls. But there are various other issues like -

- Awareness,
- Availability and quality of napkins,
- Regular supply,
- Privacy,
- Water supply,
- Proper disposal of napkins,
- Reproductive health education and
- Family support

(Which need simultaneous attention for promotion of menstrual hygiene)

Most gynecologists believe sanitary napkins can act as a precautionary measure to reduce the risk of cervical cancer among women. Inadequate menstrual protection and unhygienic practices may also lead to infertility.



## In the words of Dr M. Tripurasundari, a gynecologist

“Women from different districts come to us every day with Reproductive Tract Infections, or other diseases stemming from unhygienic menstrual practices. Besides poverty and ignorance, superstition is also a discouraging factor in use of sanitary napkins.

The body's immunity level being poor at this vulnerable time, unsanitary practices lead to ailments, some of which might even turn chronic, like cervical cancer.

## Statistical reports

According to a survey conducted by the country-wide survey conducted by AC Nielson and voluntary organization Plan India:

India has one-fourth of the world's burden of cancer of the cervix with nearly 132,000 women being diagnosed every year.

Of the 355 million menstruating women in India, only 12 per cent use sanitary napkins. Nearly 12 percent of women who use sanitary napkins are at a lesser risk of cervical cancer than women who resort to unhygienic sanitary practices. Over 88% of women resort to shocking alternatives like un-sanitized cloth, ashes and husk sand!

The reproductive tract infection (RTI) incidence was 70 percent more common among women with unhygienic sanitary practices. The biggest barrier to adoption of quality sanitary napkins in India turned out to be "affordability and accessibility" as nearly 70 percent of women said that their families cannot afford sanitary napkins. Over 88 percent of women resorted to shocking alternatives such as cloth, ashes and husk sand during menstruation, thereby causing severe reproductive health problems.



Awareness on basic health and feminine hygiene is very low, with 75 per cent rural women lacking adequate knowledge on menstrual hygiene and care.

97 per cent gynecologists surveyed believe that sanitary napkins can act as a preventive measure against reproductive tract infection, while 64 per cent noted that it can act as a precautionary measure to reduce the risk of cervical cancer.

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