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## Period Drama

**Q:** I have a 22-day menstrual cycle. When it shrunk to 20 days, I consulted a gynae who prescribed oral contraceptive pills. Is it safe to take these? —*Sonia, 28*

**A:** Every woman has her own menstrual cycle. Ideally, a cycle is calculated from the first day of the period to the first day of the next period. The cycle normally varies between 25 and 35 days. If the cycle occurs at the same time every month then we don't need to investigate. But if the cycle gets shorter or longer, month after month, or is totally erratic, it needs to be investigated.

A change in the regularity of the menstrual cycle is usually due to some hormonal imbalance. The diagnosis is made on the basis of various tests recommended after a clinical examination. For example, if the cycle is always delayed, it could be due to hypothyroidism or increased prolactin secretion. These can be easily corrected with meds, ensuring regular cycles. Early periods could indicate the presence of a cyst, a tumour or an infection in the ovaries, or it could even be due to hyperthyroidism. A temporary change in the cycle may indicate stress, which two to three months of oral contraceptive (OC) pills can help regularise.

It is important to first determine the underlying cause and treat it. Taking OC pills can help anyone get regular periods. This is because these temporarily suppress oestrogen and progesterone produced in the body. But once you stop the pills, if the causative factor still persists, your cycle will continue to be erratic.

Taking OC pills is not harmful provided the doctor has done a thorough clinical examination and the necessary tests to make sure that the pill is safe for you. 

