

Dear Okpik, I have a problem I can't discuss

Dear Okpik,

I am 14 years old and live in Barrow. I'm writing to you because I am having a problem with my periods and don't know what to do about it. I started having my periods about a year ago and they have always been fairly regular (my mother taught me to keep track of them on the calendar each month) but now I keep having bleeding every week for a day or so, or sometimes I just have blood on the toilet tissue. I don't feel sick, but I know that my friends don't bleed this way. Do I have cancer?

Also I started taking a few of my best friend's birth control pills a while ago because my boyfriend and I are sort of having sex together, sometimes. I don't want to get pregnant, but I'm afraid to go to the clinic to get some pills of my own because I'm too shy to tell the nurse why I'm there.

A couple of times I've made appointments to get some pills, but when I got there and it became my turn to talk with the nurse I always told her that



I had a sore throat or earache. What can I do? I'm really worried . . .

Sincerely,
Mariah

Dear Mariah,

I was so happy to receive your letter today . . . I have known you for several years now, and watching you grow and learn about life has been a wonderful experience for me.

I was also happy because your worries are all about problems that you can soon solve.

One thing to remember as you become older and more independent is that, as an adult you are totally responsible for yourself. This includes the responsibility for keeping yourself healthy. Fortunately, Community Health Aides, Doctors, Nurses, and other Health Care

people are available to help you explore health problems and to show you various ways to feel better. In the end, however, your actions will decide how healthy you will be.

As an adult you have the right to make an appointment with the appropriate medical person to get help with examining your body/mind, determining what the problem is, and learning what treatments are available.

It is our job as health care people to encourage you to tell us what the problem involves. We want to know, and your embarrassment or discomfort in explaining the problem is as troubling to us as it is to you.

We are as human as you are, have the same problems, and have to seek medical help in solving them just as you do. Please feel free to tell us not only about your sore throats, but also about your problems, and your need to prevent pregnancy.

Now . . . to answer your questions! It is not uncommon for someone who is taking birth control pills occasionally, and not daily, to have bleed-

ing problems.

This can also occur if the type of pill that you are taking is not quite right for your body, therefore it is very important that you *not* continue to take your friend's pills.

Young women who are thinking about having sex, or who have started having regular periods should have yearly physical that include a Pap Smear (Cancer test) and breast exam.

You can have this exam at the PHS Clinic or at the Public Health Nursing Office, and we would be very happy to have the chance to discuss ways of staying healthy, options in solving your medical problems, and methods of preventing pregnancy (including, if appropriate, prescribing birth control pills for you.)

It is your responsibility to yourself to come to us; it is our responsibility to help you.

Thank you for writing! I look forward to seeing you soon to show you some ways to decrease your worries!

Sincerely,
Okpik