

# A Guide to Hypothalamic Amenorrhea/Missing Periods

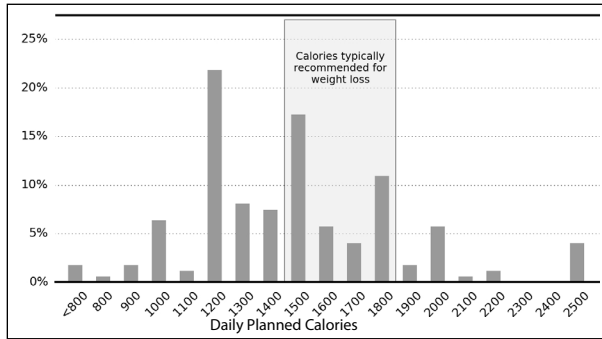
by the authors of **No Period. Now What?** Dr. Nicola Rinaldi, Stephanie Buckler and Lisa Waddell



There are multiple ways a woman can lose her menstrual cycle, one of which is hypothalamic amenorrhea (HA). In this condition, a component of the female athlete triad and relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S), signals that are supposed to be sent out by the brain's hormonal control center, the hypothalamus, are shut off or turned way down such that no egg grows, no ovulation (egg release) occurs, and hence there is no need for a period. In our experience there are five factors in acquiring HA. Eating habits, exercise, weight/weight loss, stress, and genetics. The good news is that HA is reversible in most cases.

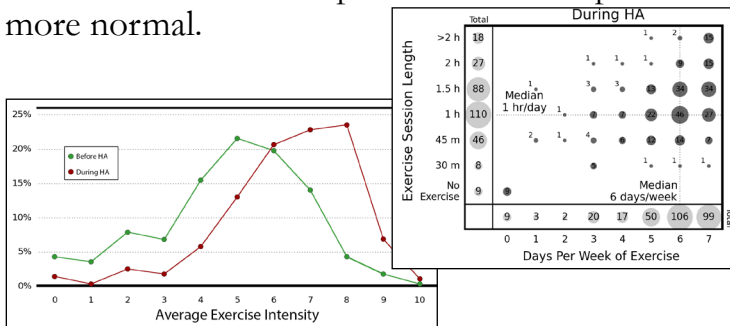
## 1. Eating habits

Caloric and food group restriction are common in women with HA. We performed a survey of over 300 women who had HA at one time and found that the average planned caloric intake was 1481 calories a day which is a level usually recommended for weight loss.



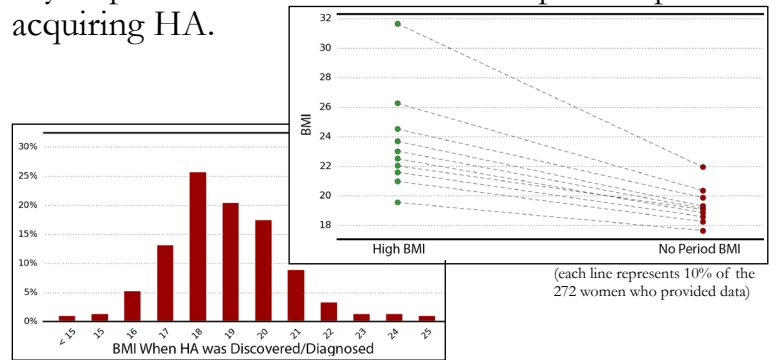
## 2. Exercise

Many women with HA exercise what the average person would call “a lot” but not everyone. The graph on the right shows the range of exercise amounts in days per week and hours per day. It is highly likely that someone exercising two hours a day, seven days a week will have HA. But there are plenty of women afflicted who exercise much less than that. In addition, exercise intensity (left) is often increased when someone has HA compared with when periods are more normal.



## 3. Weight and weight loss

People think that only someone who is severely underweight will lose her period. While it is true that 33% of our survey respondents had a BMI less than 18.5, we also had 7.5% with a BMI over 22. Weight loss was a more common finding; 82% of our survey respondents had lost 10 or more pounds prior to acquiring HA.



## 4. Stress

It is common knowledge that an acute stressful event like loss of a close family member can cause a missed period. However, the hormones that result from chronic stress are also known to shut down the hypothalamus and therefore, particularly in combination with some of the other factors, can cause periods to stop. It's important to realize that many of us with hypothalamic amenorrhea deal with constant stress from trying to live up to the goals we set for ourselves, often including eating “perfectly” and daily exercise.

## 5. Genetics

Mutations have been found in a number of proteins involved in regulation of the menstrual cycle in women with HA. This suggests a potential susceptibility to loss of periods.

A combination of these five factors is usually the culprit in causing HA. Once recognized, mindset and habits can be changed to overcome these signals shutting down the hypothalamus and periods can be restored. Learn more at [www.noperiodnowwhat.com](http://www.noperiodnowwhat.com) and download the first chapter for free!