

Having your period can be painful, messy, expensive – and optional?

Menstruation has now become an elective bodily process. “Once your periods are established, we can turn them off,” Sophia Yen, a pediatrics professor at Stanford Medical School, told me. “We now have the technology to make periods optional.”

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In clinical trials, more than 40 percent of the Liletta IUD’s users no longer menstruated by the end of the product’s six-year life. More than half of people who get the Depo-Provera shot every three months will become amenorrhoeic within a year, and almost 70 percent in the second year. And anyone using the pill, patch, or ring can safely skip scheduled withdrawal bleeding.

But getting a lighter flow as a side effect of birth control is different from choosing a contraceptive method in the hopes of turning off a period completely, and there are all sorts of reasons someone would want to do so. The cost of so-called feminine products can add up to thousands of dollars over a person’s lifetime: A recent [study](#) found that nearly two-thirds of low-income women surveyed in St. Louis couldn’t afford menstrual-hygiene products.

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Yen sees a future in which many more people know they can opt out, and do—in which no one menstruates unless they’re within two years of their first period or are trying to get pregnant. “In my ideal world, it would be about 28 periods over the course of a lifetime,” she said.

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