NIDA/TAHARAT HAMISHPACHA

Four Most Common Nida Questions

1. **What Makes a Woman a *Nida***

Introduction to What Makes a Woman a *Nida*

Vaginal Blood Flow

Only vaginal blood flow makes a woman *nida*.

Nida D'Oraita

According to *Torah* law (*d'oraita*), a woman becomes a *nida* when she experiences a flow of uterine blood, preceded or accompanied by a *hargasha*. Because uterine blood flow is difficult to distinguish from the more general vaginal blood flow, we assume that a vaginal blood flow is from the uterus--unless a medical person (it could be a midwife) determines that the blood flow is not uterine.

Nida D'Rabanan

By *rabbinic* law (*d'rabanan*), a woman can become a *nida* even with only a qualifying stain (see below).

Hargasha

A *hargasha* is anything that signals that the woman's period is imminent. There are three classical *hargashot*, as well as possible *hargashot* that pertain only to an individual woman.

NOTE Many women today do not have *hargashot*.

Classical *Hargashot*

There are three classical *hargashot*:

1) **Body Tremor**

2) ***Petichat HaMakor***

Some women, at *petichat ha'makor* ("opening of the uterus"), have a sensation of release similar to when one's bladder opens to urinate.

3) ***Zivat Davar Lach***

Sensation of wet discharge that comes only with her period; this is not the wet discharge that every woman normally feels multiple times daily.

NOTE She does not necessarily need to feel it coming from her cervix in order for it to make her a *nida*.

Individual *Hargashot*

What Is an Individual *Hargasha*

The individual *hargasha* can be any physiological occurrence (pimples on her face, a bout of yawning, a bloated feeling in the belly, etc.) that correlates with a woman's getting her period within 24 hours. To become established as a *hargasha*, it must have happened three times in a row.

NOTE Cramps for most women may be a *hargasha*, since they may mean that the woman is about to have her period.

When a woman has a *hargasha*, we assume that her period has started, and she should immediately stop what she is doing and check internally with a *bedika* cloth. If she does a *bedika* as soon as possible and the cloth shows a forbidden color, or shows no discharge at all, she immediately becomes *nida* for at least 12 days, after which she goes to the *mikva*.

NOTE If she had a *hargasha* and finds no blood and no discharge, she becomes a *nida*, since we assume there was blood and she just didn't find it. If the *bedika* cloth shows brown, magenta, salmon, brick, amber, orange, etc., the *rabbi* will want to see the cloth to determine her status.

NOTE Most medium browns are OK.

What To Do If Not Sure
If she is not sure she has had a *hargasha*, she asks a *rabbi* and together they will sort out the answer.

Nida D'Rabanan

Stain (without *Hargasha*)

Stain Colors
A *rabbi* should be consulted in all matters of questionable colors of stains. Some may seem to you to be forbidden but turn out to be permissible, and vice versa.

Stain Location
A stain of a color that could make a woman a *nida* can be on material or on the woman's body. None of the following lenient conditions apply if the woman is *nida d'oraita*:

Stains on Material
A stain on material must conceivably have been in contact with the lower regions of her body (nightgown, sheet, towel, etc.). A stain on material makes the woman a *nida* only if ALL FOUR following conditions apply**:**
1. Stain Is on White Material.
2. Stain Is on Material that Can Become Impure (*mikabel tum'a*)—natural materials such as cotton or silk.

NOTE A combination of polyester and cotton counts as cotton.

3. Stain Is at least Size of *Gris*/US penny.

NOTE A bunch of disconnected stains will not be a problem as long as no one of them is at least a *gris* on its own.

4. Stain Is Not Positively Attributable to Another Cause (such as hemorrhoids).

NOTE If the woman finds a stain (even during or after the seven clean days), even if it is more than the size of a gris, she is OK if the material is not white OR is not *mikabel tum'a*. However, it the stain is larger than half of a US dollar bill, she should consult a *rabbi*.
If she had a *hargasha* before she found the stain, none of these leniencies apply**.**

Stains on Woman's Body
If a woman finds a stain on the lower regions of her body, it will make her a *nida* if it is:

1. Not positively attributable to another cause, AND
2. At least the size of a *gris*. For small, unconnected spots, she must evaluate whether, together, they equal the size of a *gris* (on material, the spots DO NOT get combined). If yes, she should consult a *rabbi*.

II. HARCHAKOT: How Do the Couple Conduct Themselves while the Wife is a *Nida*?

According to *Torah* law, when a woman is a *nida*, she and her husband are prohibited not only from having intercourse, but also ("*lo tikrav*"—*Vayikra* 18:19) from having any physical contact of a passionate or romantic nature (*negiya shel chibuk v'nishuk*)--those patterns of physical contact that often lead to

intercourse. Since the penalty for violation is *kareit*, husband and wife should live separately during the *nida* period, but because we don't, we use “distancers” (*harchakot*) as reminders of distance while living together in the same home. The *harchakot* sensitize us to the smallest gestures of love. The couple who know that in a finite amount of time their union will not only be permitted, but even be *davar sh'bekedusha*--a thing of sanctity--will have the willpower to wait it out.

These *harchakot* are applied during the *nida* period:

General *Harchakot*
S'chok v'Kalut Rosh In general, avoid fun activities which could lead to lightheadedness)

Negiya Afilu b'Etzba Ketana Avoid any physical contact, even if not romantic.

The Bedroom
Mita Achat ("Single Bed") Do not share one bed. You must have two separate beds, but there is no standard for how far apart the separate mattresses and linens should be, except that they must be more than 1 *tefach* (3.5 inches) apart from each other. If there is one headboard, one bed should be moved away from the headboard.

L'Hatzia Mitato b'Fanav The wife may not, in front of her husband, prepare his bed for sleeping (as opposed to the chore of making the beds in the morning).

Sitting on the Bed The husband may not sit or lie on wife's bed unless she is out of town; the wife may not lie on her husband's bed in his presence.

Wining and Dining
K'ara Achat ("Single Plate") Husband and wife may not share a plate as they eat. A husband may not eat of his wife's leftovers unless someone else ate from it in between, it was transferred to another plate, or she has left the table for the duration of the meal.

Shulchan Echad ("Single Table") You may not eat at the same table unless you put an item between yourselves that is not normally on the table. Reminders (*heker*) can be napkin rings, a flower, a food item known not to be part of the meal, etc. Special placemats are also acceptable reminders.

NOTE If other people are sharing the meal with you, you do not need a reminder.

Hagashat Ochel Li'Fanav ("Serving Food in Front of Him") The wife may not directly serve her husband food except in an altered way.

EXAMPLE
The wife may put the plate to the side of her husband instead of in front of him.

Mezigat HaKos Bi'Fanav The husband may not pour his wife a cup of any drink in front of her. The wife may not pour her husband a cup of any drink in front of him.

Lishlo'ach La Kos Bracha The husband may not even send or pass a cup of wine to his wife, even by someone else and even if she is in a different room. After the husband makes *kiddush*, *havdala*, or *sheva brachot*, he puts the wine down in front of himself and then his wife may take the cup and drink. If there are other people present, the husband may pour wine into several cups and one of them may be passed to his wife (since no specific cup was designated for his wife).

Individual *Harchakot*
Histaklut b'Mkomot HaMechusim The *man* may not gaze appreciatively at those parts of the woman's body that are normally covered.

Hoshata M'Yad L'Yad ("Passing from Hand to Hand") The couple may not pass things by hand to each other.

Zerika MiYad L'Yad The husband or wife may not throw something for the other to catch.

Safsal Mitnaded The couple may not sit on any surface that is not firmly attached to the ground and in which the movement of one person causes the other person to move.

Tiyul baSfina O Agala: The couple may not take a pleasure (destination-less) trip on a boat or wagon. However, if they have a destination, it is OK.

Perfume The husband may not intentionally smell his wife's perfume (even if she is not wearing it!).

Yitzikat V'Hava'at Mayim V'Richitzat Panav, Yadav, V'Raglav Except for *mitzvot*, the wife may not draw or bring water to wash his hand, face, or feet or draw his bath for him.

Illness The wife may do what the husband needs if he is sick. If the wife is sick, the husband may only help her in cases of substantial need.

III. *Tahara* after *Nida*:
The Five Steps of Purification

1. Minimum Duration of *Nida*
A woman will be a *nida* even if she saw blood on only one day. But she must wait until the fifth day before she may begin counting her seven clean days (in unusual circumstances, she MAY be permitted to reduce the 5 initial day count--consult a *rabbi*).

NOTE In counting *nida* **(**bleeding) days (as opposed to clean days), part of a day counts as a full day.

EXAMPLE If the bleeding starts at 2p on Wednesday, the woman counts from 2p until sundown as Day 1. Thursday is Day 2, etc. Sunday before sundown, she may do the first *bedika*.

2. *Hefsek Tahara*
On the fifth day (or whenever--after the fifth day--the bleeding and staining seems to be ending), she does a *hefsek tahara* to check very carefully internally to make sure all the bleeding and staining is over. The *hefsek tahara* has three parts:

1. Wash or cleanse lower regions of the body.
2. Do an internal check/*bedika*: Insert a white cloth into vagina and circle it around to make sure to get every nook and cranny.
3. *Moch dachuk*: Insert a *bedika* cloth within two *halachic* hours of sunset and leave it in until after dark.

REASON The seven clean days must be complete days. Since we don't know exactly what time the first day begins, the cloth is inserted before sunset of the first “clean” day.

NOTE If doing this causes any problem for her, she should consult a *rabbi*.

3. Count of Seven Clean Days with Three Components

1. ***Bedika***

The woman must have seven complete consecutive *halachic* days free of any impure discharge (generally means bleeding). She should make an internal examination each day when she gets up, and another before sunset. If this regimen will cause her problems, she should consult a *rabbi*.

2. **White Underpants**

During the seven clean days, the woman must wear white underpants. But if she wears tight-fitting underpants, as in contemporary clothing, only the part under the vaginal area must be white.

NOTE If the woman has any bleeding during or after the seven clean days, she should consult a *rabbi*.

3. **No *Hesech Da'at***

A woman does not need to think about the seven clean days all of the time, but she must keep in mind, during the entire *nida* purification process, that she is not in an active *nida* state.

SITUATION A woman found a stain and asked a *rabbi* about it. She assumed she was definitely *nida*.

WHAT TO DO Once she assumes that she has become a *nida* during that seven-day period, she must begin her count again--even once she has found out that she was not, in fact, a *nida*.

NOTE If she asked the *rabbi* while not yet assuming that she was definitely a *nida*, she may continue her original count after the *rabbi* determines that she was not a *nida*.

4. Chafifa

Chafifa General Rules

The woman must do total body cleansing, particularly the hairy areas, to make sure there is no intervening substance (*chatzitza*). Anything that is not part of the body, and which can be fairly easily removed, should be removed before immersing in a *mikva*.

REASON In order for a woman to become *tehora*, she needs to be totally immersed in the *mikva* all at one time, with no *chatzitza* between her and the *mikva* waters.
There are three definitions of *chatzitza*:

a. D'Oraita

According to *Torah* law, something is only a *chatzitza* if it is "*ruba v'makpida*"—something that covers the body **AND** bothers the woman. Very few *chatzitzot* are in this category; here are some:

- Full body cast.
- Being covered with sand.
- Being sweaty from head to toe.

b. D'Rabanan

Chazal said a *chatzitza* is something that covers the body **OR** bothers the woman.

EXAMPLES

- Moisturizer that covers most of her body.
- Adhesive that is left on her skin after a band-aid has been removed.
- Imperfect manicure, if she would not go to an interview like that.

c. Nashim Nahagu

Nashim Nahagu means a practice that women took upon themselves: Everything that a woman can easily get off, she tries to get off--even if it covers only a small part of the body and it does not bother her at all. This is a custom (*minhag*) that later became a *d'rabanan halacha*.

NOTE In cases in which this type of *halacha* generates a *shalom bayit* issue or would cause someone to avoid immersing in the *mikva*, consult a *rabbi*.

Chafifa: Nails, Teeth, Contact Lenses

Cutting Nails

The woman should cut her nails at least flush with the fingertips.

NOTE If a woman would not want to immerse in the *mikva* because she doesn't want to cut her nails, ask a *rabbi*.

Cleaning Teeth/Removing Contact Lenses

The woman must clean her teeth and remove contact lenses even though the *mikva* waters do not need to contact the internal surfaces of the mouth or the eyes.

REASON While the woman is not required to open her mouth or eyes while immersing, the water must be able to make contact if she did open her mouth or eyes.

If You Forgot

If she is already home or after having relations, she found she had forgotten to take out her lenses, or she finds another *chatzitza*, she should ask a *rabbi*.

5. Immersion in *Mikva/Tevila*

Mikva: Timing

When To Go To *Mikva*

If her husband is in town, it is a *mitzva* to go to the *mikva* as soon as *halachically* permitted.

When *Mikva in Unsafe Neighborhood*

If the *mikva* is in a neighborhood that is unsafe at night, she may go during the day (she immerses on the eighth day instead of the night of the seventh night).

When *Mikva* Night Is Friday Night

Any woman whose *mikva* night is Friday night SHOULD make every effort to go to the *mikva* that night.

If *Mikva* Too Far

If *mikva* night is Friday night and the *mikva* is not within walking distance (and/or there is inclement weather), in general she may postpone going until after *Shabbat* is over. Consult a *rabbi* about driving Friday afternoon and immersing before dark for such instances as:

- ***Shalom Bayit*** (in this case, she is not permitted see her husband until after dark Friday night).
- **Dangerous Neighborhood.**
- **Infertility Issues** (if she will miss ovulation if she does not go Friday night).

Preparations before Friday Night

Ideally, the woman should complete her full-scale *mikva* preparation--including bath and shower--before *Shabbat*, light candles before *Shabbat*, walk to the *mikva*, immerse after dark, and then walk home.
If the *mikva* is within walking distance and the weather is inclement, the first-level *b'di'avad* is to finish preparing for *Shabbat* and *mikva*, including making a blessing on the *Shabbat* candles (verbally stipulating that she is not accepting *Shabbat* at this lighting), be driven to the *mikva*, and wait until her turn to immerse.

Mikva: How To Immerse

Kosher immersion/*tevila* requires simultaneous immersion of every exposed part of the body (not *bet ha'starim*). Here is the best way to accomplish simultaneous immersion:

- Enter the water until it is about 12 inches above the navel.
- Make sure that every part of your body is relaxed (if you squeeze anything, you create crevices and cracks that impede complete access to your skin).
- "Flesh"/*basar* is exposed to the water when standing while leaning a little forward.

- Exhale and push yourself under the water until you are certain that all of your body and all of your hair are submerged.
- Once your head is above the surface of the water, say the blessing and then immerse again, the same way.

Back Home

If neither spouse wants to have marital relations, that is no problem; however, if either one wants to, the spouse is required to accommodate the interested spouse.

EXCEPTION If a spouse does not feel well (not if too tired--that is no excuse!): *RMH* uses this guideline: If you feel so bad that you would not go out of house to pick up $500, you are sick!

IV. Anticipating the Next Period/Veset

What To Anticipate

In anticipating the time of the month when her period is most likely to occur (*onat ha'veset*), a woman must determine both:

1. The day of the month, and
2. Whether it will begin during the daytime period (sunrise to sunset) or the nighttime period (from sunset to sunrise)

NOTE This period may be more or less than 12 hours!

What To Do

Once the woman has determined her *onat ha'veset,* she and her husband must abstain from relations during that daytime or nighttime period. If the *onat ha'veset* passed and the period did not come (determined by 1 or 2 *bedikot* during the *onat ha'veset*), then the husband and wife may resume a normal marital relationship until her period comes.

NOTE Although the *halacha* refers to abstaining from relations during that period, many people are stringent (*machmir)* to also abstain from intimate affectionate contact (*negiya shel chibuk v'nishuk).* But additional prohibitions (*harchakot*) beyond *negiya shel chibuk v'nishuk*, such as passing food, sitting on a moving object that one person moves, etc., do not apply to this anticipation period.

NOTE Many people also abstain from relations and intimate contact during the day and night preceding the expected *veset*.

Regular and Irregular

Every woman needs to be able to anticipate her next period, whether she is a) regular or b) irregular. "Regular" is determined by any pattern to one's menstrual cycle that occurs three times in a row.

NOTE It is very uncommon for a woman to maintain her regular period for a long time.

Anticipating a Regular Period

Here are the five most classic regular patterns:

1. ***Veset HaChodesh* (Monthly Cycle)**

Veset ha'chodesh is when the period appears in three consecutive months:
a) On the exact same Jewish-calendar date, and
b) All three times at night, or all three times during the day.

EXAMPLE
A woman gets her period on these three dates:
12 *Tishrei*--night
12 *Cheshvan*—night

12 *Kislev*—night

The couple will abstain 12 *Tevet*—night.

NOTE Many people begin to abstain from the 11th during the day.

2. ***Veset Haflaga* (Intervals Cycle)**

Veset haflaga is when the menstrual period appears on four consecutive occasions at three intervals of identical length apart and they are either all during the daytime or all during the nighttime.

3. ***Veset HaGuf* (Body Symptoms Cycle)**

In *veset ha'guf,* the menstrual period comes within one day after a very specific symptom that is experienced as heralding the period, such as lower back ache, aching breasts, etc.

4. ***Veset HaMurkav* (Combination Cycle)**

In *veset ha'murkav,* the woman is regular**,** three times in a row, for a Body Symptom (#3: *Veset HaGuf*) in conjunction with either a Monthly Cycle (#1: *Veset HaChodesh*) or an Intervals Cycle (#2: *Veset Haflaga*).

EXAMPLE
On the 10th of three *Hebrew* months in a row, a woman gets lower abdominal cramps; and on the 12th of each *Hebrew* month, for three months in a row, she gets her period.

NOTE If she gets cramps on the 11th of the month, she does not need to separate and she may ignore those symptoms for that month. She will separate once she gets her period.

***5. Veset HaMa'aseh (*Action Cycle)**
In *veset ha'ma'aseh,* a particular activity has caused her period to come three months in a row.

EXAMPLE
A woman goes to a sauna and that causes her period.

Anticipating an Irregular Period
A woman with an irregular period may have to abstain from relations and affectionate intimate contact (*negiya shel chibuk v'nishuk*) during these three *onot*/time periods:

1. ***Yom HaChodesh***

Same *Hebrew* calendar date and the same daytime or nighttime period as her prior period started (but it has not yet been three times in a row).

2. ***Haflaga***

Same interval of days between her two most recent periods, projected to the next month (daytime or nighttime period).

3. ***Ona Beinonit***

Thirtieth day after the most recent period when counting intervals. Count from Day 1 of Period 1 through Day 1 of Period 2.

NOTE The 30-day interval includes both start days.

NOTE The 30th day, every other month, will be the same as *Yom HaChodesh.*

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