

## Some Womens' Health Considerations for Kokoda Trail Trip

Excerpts from 'Travelling Well' Dr Deborah Mills

- Thrush
- Bladder infection
- Hygiene
- Stopping periods
- Other issues with the contraceptive pill
- Irregular periods
- Hair loss during/after travel
- Packing list



### Thrush

Thrush is a most unpleasant condition to have while travelling! Doxycycline is the common anti-malarial medication used for this part of the world and about 9% of women taking doxycycline will develop thrush. Cotton underclothes may help prevent it but you need to carry medicines so you can treat thrush promptly if symptoms develop.

### Cystitis/Urinary Tract Infection

Many women experience cystitis or urinary tract infections when travelling. If you are prone to this type of infection, ensure you drink plenty of fluids, and treat yourself promptly if symptoms develop.

### Feminine hygiene

Toilet and general washing facilities may be limited. During a menstrual period, ensure your hands are clean before tampons are used. Wash hands with soap and water, (tap water is OK), and dry your hands with a clean towel. Products such as Microshield™ hand wash can be used where soap and water is not available. The use of tampon applicators may be convenient. Stopping your periods for the duration of the walk may be a very good idea – see below.

### Stopping periods

Medical research has shown that you do not NEED to have a period every month. If you are on the pill, some contraceptive pills can be taken continuously, thus avoiding periods altogether. This is safe. It is easier with monophasic (one strength pills) like Microgynon, Levlen, or Nordette. You simply skip the sugar pills for that month. This will delay your period 3 weeks. Most women can safely skip three periods in a row.

If you are taking 'multiple dose pills' (e.g. Triquilar, Triphasil, Trifeme), skipping the sugar pills may not work. To delay a period on these pills you need to do this: when you reach the end of your active pills for the month - instead of taking the sugar pills, use a spare packet and take the last week of active pills from the spare packet. Then take the sugar pills. This will delay your period for a week.

Generally it is best to always take a 'Saturday' pill on a Saturday or confusion may occur. Discuss this with your doctor. If you want to skip periods, it may be easier to temporarily change to a 'one strength pill'.

## Other issues with the Pill

### **Vomiting ....and the Pill**

If you are ill, and vomit within five hours of taking the pill, it may not have been absorbed. You should take another pill to replace the one lost. Use a spare packet; it is better to use a replacement pill for the correct day of the week, i.e. take a Thursday pill on a Thursday.

### **Diarrhoea ....and the Pill**

It is difficult to predict the effect that diarrhoea will have on pill absorption. The safest course of action is to continue taking the pill, but use other means of contraception while you have severe diarrhoea and until 7 active pills after the diarrhoea has ceased.

### **Antibiotics ....and the Pill**

This is important if you need to take antibiotics for diarrhoea, or with some of the antimalarial tablets. Some antibiotics interfere with the effectiveness of the contraceptive pill. This may lead to spotting in the middle of the month, or even pregnancy. For most antibiotics, use other means of contraception while taking the antibiotic and for 7 active contraceptive pills afterwards.

### **Malaria tablets ...and the Pill**

Doxycycline, a commonly used antimalarial for this region, may interfere with the 'pill' leading to irregular bleeding or even pregnancy. Chloroquine, Maloprim, Malarone and mefloquine (Lariam) do not interfere with the oral contraceptive pill. Use other means of contraception while on doxycycline and for at least 7 active contraceptive pills after finishing the malaria pills.

## Irregular periods

If you are not on the pill, it is common to have irregular periods while travelling, especially on this sort of trip. Your periods may come early or come late – be prepared. It is harmless except for the logistics of dealing with sanitary protection, and perhaps the concern of possible pregnancy if they are very late .

## Hair loss during or shortly after travel

This is not a specifically female problem but tends to be more noticeable and cause more concern in women. It is quite common after prolonged or stressful travel to notice an increase in the loss of hair on brushes or on the pillow after sleeping. The hair does grow back. Have a checkup when you get home just in case it is something else.

## Packing list for women

- Thrush medicine – pessaries and cream
- Extra supplies of tampons/sanitary protection
- Noroxin & Ural – in case of urinary tract/bladder infection
- Extra supplies of the contraceptive pill if relevant