

Heavy Bleeding/Heavy Periods

What is it?

This is when you have an excessive and or prolonged amount of bleeding during your period over several menstrual cycles. This can be referred to as 'menorrhagia'. The amount of blood loss is different for each individual and can vary depending on medication, operations or the time in a Woman's life. This makes it difficult to generalise the problem of heavy bleeding/heavy periods.

Symptoms

You could experience one or more of these symptoms.

- Excessive blood loss that requires you to change your sanitary wear more frequently than normal. Or having to wear double the number of sanitary wear at the same time to control the flow.
- Periods that last for longer than normal.
- Passing blood clots.
- Feeling exhausted and drained of energy whilst on and just after your period.
- You could have an iron deficiency, being diagnosed with anaemia.
- Whilst sitting or lying down seats or sheets can become soaked due to the bleeding. This is known as 'flooding'.

Causes

There are several causes for heavy bleeding and are rarely due to serious disease.

Some of these causes are outlined below:

- PCOS (Polycystic ovary syndrome) – This is where you have multiple cysts in the ovaries.
- Uterine fibroids or endometrial polyps – non-cancerous growths in the uterus.
- Endometriosis – When parts from the womb are found outside of the womb.
- An IUD – a contraceptive device (coil).
- Medication – Anticoagulant medicines which help reduce blood clots

Diagnosis

There are several ways by which the cause for heavy bleeding can be found.

- Medical history – There could be answers found in the nature and details of your cycle. Questions would be asked about any medication you take or if you are using any type of contraception. You may be also asked if there is any associated pain with the bleeding and you would be asked about your family medical history.
- Pelvic examination – This would be done with your consent and with a chaperone present. The consultant would examine internally and externally to identify any signs of infection or size increases in the womb.
- Blood test – To identify if there is anything irregular with in your blood which could be causing the heavy bleeding.

- Pelvic scan – This is an ultrasound and it is painless. It allows the consultant to be able to examine the structure inside the pelvis.
- Endometrial biopsy – This is done when the inner lining of the womb is thicker than normal a sample will be taken for testing to find out the reason for thickness.
- Hysteroscopy – This is a procedure that allows the consultant to use a fine telescope to see the lining and shape of the uterus and the womb. Also helps to identify any polyps or fibroids.

Treatment

The treatment you receive is dependent on your own medical needs and the consultant's diagnosis.

Types of treatment:

Alternative medicine/therapy – This can be exercised by implementing changes in the day to day life e.g. diet to see if changes in lifestyle could reduce bleeding. Small changes in health like losing weight or increasing exercise could also make changes.

Medicine – You can take medicine that helps reduce the blood clots or medicine that helps reduce the bleeding during your period.

Hormone treatments – The contraceptive pill can be taken and can result in reducing the amount of bleeding. Progesterone can be taken which mimics a pregnancy which stops menstruation however it can also mimic the side effects of pregnancy. There are methods in which progesterone can be taken to allow it to be beneficial and reduce any adverse effects.

Surgery – There are two main options for surgery. One is endometrial surgery where the inner lining of the womb is removed. The objective is to remove the area that bleeds. The second option is to have a hysterectomy which is the removal of the uterus.