

HEAVY PERIODS FACT SHEET

The Facts about Heavy Periods

Heavy periods, often referred to as excessive menstrual bleeding or menorrhagia is a common condition. About 20 to 25 percent of women report suffering from it. One in 20 women aged 30-49 consults her doctor each year with menorrhagia.

Between 15 and 20 percent of healthy women experience debilitating menorrhagia that interferes with their normal activities. Bleeding heavily and/or if periods last more than seven days is considered excessively heavy menstruation.

If you suffer from heavy periods, you are not alone. More than 1 woman in 5 share this common condition. The good news is that effective treatments for heavy periods are available, and you have choices.

What are heavy periods?

The correct medical definition of heavy periods is the passage of more than 80 ml of blood during a menstrual cycle. This translates into bleeding for more than seven days or needing to use more than 10 pads or tampons per day during the menstrual cycle. It is seldom realistic or practical, however, to actually measure the blood loss and so doctors rely on the woman's description of her period.

Periods are considered heavy when:

- A woman bleeds for more than 8 to 10 days, especially if this is repeated month after month.
- A woman bleeds so much that it is difficult for her to attend her job. She may be forced to plan her holidays and leisure time according to the timings of her period.
- The bleeding is continuously so heavy that the woman becomes anemic. Excessive menstrual bleeding is a common cause of iron deficiency anemia (low blood count with low iron). More than two-thirds (67 percent) of patients who have excessive menstrual bleeding also suffer from anemia.
- The presence of other than small clots for more than one or two days suggests heavy periods.
- Flooding describes the sudden, unexpected onset of periods, like turning on a tap, and indicates heavy periods.

Every woman is unique, and so are her periods. When it comes to periods – how long they last, how heavy they are – there is a wide range of normal. But usually, the average period lasts 5-7 days, and the average amount of blood lost is only one to two ounces per cycle. On the other hand, if you suffer from heavy periods you may bleed as much as 10 to 25 times that amount each month (Source: National Women's Health Resource Center).

And if you do, you probably know what it's like to experience one or more of these difficult and disruptive symptoms:

- Periods that last longer than seven days.
- Menstrual flow that interferes with your regular activities or lifestyle and causes anxiety about embarrassing accidents.
- Menstrual flow that soaks through one or more tampons or napkins every hour for several consecutive hours.
- Menstrual flow that includes large blood clots.
- Fatigue or shortness of breath (which are symptoms of anemia caused by blood loss).

Common causes of excessive menstrual bleeding

- **Fibroids and polyps** – can cause structural uterine bleeding, and account for 30 percent of hysterectomies performed.
- **Hormonal imbalance** – can cause dysfunctional uterine bleeding and accounts for approximately 20 percent of hysterectomies performed.
- **Infection or disease** – infection of the uterus or cervix and certain types of cancer, such as cancer of the uterus, cervix or vagina can cause uterine bleeding.

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