

Medical Management of Heavy Periods

There are lots of choices available for the treatment of heavy periods. Many women are able to manage their periods with the help of medication and don't need to have an operation. The advantages of avoiding surgery include not having to be admitted to hospital, no need for time off work or leisure activities and avoiding the small but real risks associated with surgery.

This information leaflet explains some of the medication used to treat heavy periods to help you decide which to try. They don't all work straight away and we recommend you try one for at least 3 months before deciding to try another.

Some of the treatments can be used together to work better. They all have to be prescribed by a doctor and it is important to always read the manufacturers leaflet along with this one.

Tranexamic Acid (Cyclokapron)

What is this?

These are tablets taken three times a day during the heavy days of your period for a maximum of 4 days.

Is it a hormone?

Tranexamic acid is not a hormone, and doesn't affect the timing of the cycle. It works by reducing the breakdown of blood clots in your womb so it reduces menstrual bleeding.

How does it affect my periods?

It can help make the periods up to 50% lighter and if it works for you can be taken long term.



This is one of the best medical treatments for heavy periods.

Can I take them?

These tablets are not suitable for you if you have kidney disease or a history of blood clots in the legs or lungs.

Can I take them with any other treatments?

Yes. They may be taken in combination with mefenamic acid or cyclical progestogen in the long term, or in combination with the Mirena or Depo Provera whilst the beneficial effects are awaited.

Are there any side effects?

Side effects are rare but can include sickness and diarrhoea.

Does it protect against pregnancy?

Tranexamic Acid is not a method of contraception and if you don't want to become pregnant, you still need to use contraception.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories e.g. Mefenamic Acid (Ponstan)

What is this?

These are tablets taken three times a day during the heavy days of your period.



How will they effect my periods?

They can make your periods up to 1/3rd lighter. They can also help if you have painful periods.

Are they hormones?

They are not hormones and won't affect the timing of your cycle.

Does it protect against pregnancy?

Mefenamic acid does not act as a contraceptive and if you do not want to become pregnant, you still need to use contraception.

Can I take them?

These tablets are not suitable for you if you have ulcers in the stomach, get bad indigestion, have severe asthma or kidney disease.

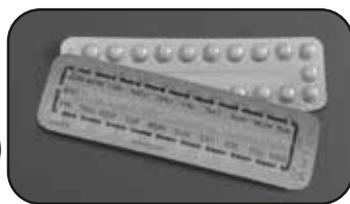
Can I take them with any other treatments?

Yes. This can be taken in combination with tranexamic acid, the combined pill, cyclical progestogens or whilst the beneficial effects of the Mirena or Depo Provera are awaited.

Are there any side effects?

They should be taken with food as they can cause some indigestion or sickness. Whilst taking the tablets, you should not take aspirin as well.

Combined Oral Contraceptive Pill ('The COCP')



What is this?

This is a hormonal medication that regulates your periods and often makes them lighter and less painful.

How do I take it?

The tablets come in monthly packs and involves taking 21 active tablets (one each day at around the same time) and then either 7 days without a pill before starting the next packet or 7 inactive

(sugar) pills depending on which manufacturers packs your doctor chooses. The period comes during the pill free or sugar pill days.

Does it protect against pregnancy?

Yes, it also provides very good contraception.

Can I take it?

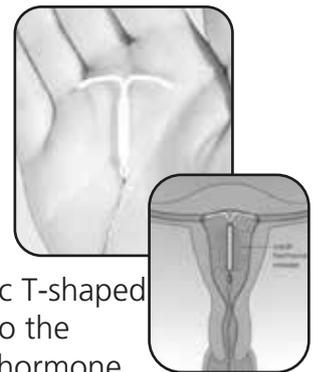
This treatment is not suitable for you if you have had or are at risk of having clots in the legs or lungs, have heart disease, suffer with migraines, have liver disease. You may not be suitable if you have 2 or more of the following: are very overweight, over 35 years old, smoke, have high blood pressure, have diabetes.

Are there any side effects?

Side effects are rare, but some women experience sickness, headaches, changes in body weight and breast tenderness (this usually settles after a couple of months).

There is a 3 to 3.5 fold increase in clots in the legs and lungs in women who take the pill but despite this increased risk the number of clots in women taking the COCP is still very small. The COCP also has other health benefits in that it protects against cancer of the ovary and womb, but it is thought that there may be a small increase in the risk of breast cancer.

Mirena Intrauterine System (IUS)



What is a Mirena?

The Mirena is a small plastic T-shaped device which is inserted into the womb. It slowly releases a hormone (progestogen) that thins the lining of your womb. It has two very fine threads that come through the cervix (neck of the womb) opening and rest at the top of the vagina, so that it can be checked and also so it can be removed when necessary. It can be left in place for 5 years.

How does it make my periods lighter?

The hormone is released gradually into the womb and makes the lining of the womb thin, which in turn makes your periods much lighter (90% lighter). This is one of the best medical treatments for heavy periods. 7-8 in 10 women report being happy with the IUS.

Are there any side effects?

Many women experience light bleeding in between their periods for the first 3 to 6 months after it's fitted. You may find that the heaviness of your periods is unchanged for the first few months, but if you continue with the IUS, this usually improves. For 1 in 5 women their periods will stop altogether. It is recommended to keep the IUS in for at least 6 months to see what happens to your bleeding.

In a small number of women there may be difficulty fitting the IUS and they may need it fitting under general anaesthetic. Rarely, during insertion, the IUS can make a small hole in the womb called a perforation (1:1000) and an operation may be needed to remove the IUS. Occasionally, the IUS may fall out of your womb (expulsion) 1:20, this is most common in the first 3 months following insertion.

How long does it last?

The Mirena lasts for 5 years.

Does it protect against pregnancy?

The Mirena is also an excellent choice of contraception with failure rates similar to female sterilisation.

How is it fitted?

The Mirena is fitted by a doctor or nurse using a speculum (instrument to see the cervix just like when you have a smear test). A plastic tube containing the Mirena is passed through the cervix (neck of the womb) into the womb. The tube is removed, the Mirena stays inside the lining of the womb. The threads pass down through the cervix into the vagina. They do not interfere with sexual intercourse or with using tampons.

Does it hurt?

Most women find that fitting the Mirena causes only a little discomfort and afterwards you might feel some cramping like period pain. This usually disappears after a few hours and your doctor can prescribe some painkillers.

If you have any more questions about the Mirena, please ask for a more detailed information leaflet.

Depo Provera (injection)



What is this?

This is a hormone injection that is given every 3 months.

Does it protect against pregnancy?

Yes, it is a good contraceptive.

What happens to my periods?

Women often notice periods are a lot lighter and some women have no periods at all. The disadvantage is that some women have irregular bleeding which although light, can be quite frequent.

Are there any side effects?

Side effects include fluid retention and weight gain in some women. There is also a small reduction in bone mineral density which usually recovers after stopping the depo. For this reason we do not usually recommend depo provera in women over the age of 45.

Cyclical Progestogen (e.g. Norethisterone or Medroxyprogesterone Acetate)

What is this?

This is a hormone tablet that can be taken to help make your periods more regular and lighter.



Is it suitable for me?

If irregular bleeding is a problem, your periods can be made more regular by taking progestogen for 21 days every month. Your period should arrive during the seven days you aren't taking tablets.

Will it make the periods lighter?

Yes, but if heavy bleeding is also a problem, you may need to try one of the other options listed in this leaflet as well as an alternative.

Does it protect against pregnancy?

No, this it is not a method of contraception and if you don't want to become pregnant, you still need to use contraception.

Can I take these tablets?

If you have a history of liver damage or significant heart disease, progestogen are not suitable for you.

Are there any side effects?

Some people get feelings of bloating, breast tenderness, fluid retention and weight gain when taking progestogens.

Hormone Replacement Treatment (HRT)



What is this?

These are hormone tablets that help to make your periods more regular. The strength of the hormones are very low compared to 'The Pill'.

Is it suitable for me?

If you are over 40 and especially if you are getting menopausal symptoms (hot flushes, mood swings), it may be a good choice.

What happens to my periods?

You take a tablet every day and you get a period once a month or once every three months depending upon which type you decide. If heavy periods are a problem, it may not make them lighter.

Does it protect against pregnancy?

No, it is not a method of contraception and if you don't want to become pregnant, you still need to use contraception.

Can I take it?

HRT is not suitable for you if you have a history of thromboembolism (deep vein clots in the legs or lungs), breast cancer or heart disease.

Are there any side effects?

Most women feel fine on HRT, but some experience nausea (feeling sick) and tummy cramps, weight change, breast tenderness and enlargement. There is also a small increased risk of developing a clot in the legs or lungs especially in the first year of use.

Additional reading:

- www.nhs.uk/conditions/heavy-periods/

If you have any further questions, please contact:

- Pre-assessment nurses01392 406530/1

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by RD&E staff undertaking procedures at the RD&E hospitals.

© Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust

Designed by Graphics (Print & Design), RD&E