Patient Information

Medical Management of Heavy Periods

There are lots of choices available for the treatment of heavy periods and many women manage their periods with the help of medicines and don’t need to have any operations. 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 medicines 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 one.

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 that are taken three times a day during the heavy days of the period.

Are they hormones?
They are not hormones and don’t affect the timing of the cycle and don’t need to be taken at other times of the month.

How do they affect the periods?
They can help make the periods up to 50% lighter and if they work 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 mefanamic 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 affects are rare but 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.

Mefanamic Acid (Ponstan)

What is this?
These tablets are taken three times a day during the heavy days of the period.

How will they effect my periods?
They can make the periods one third 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?
Mefanamic 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 Pill’)

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 and you may not be suitable if you have 2 or more of the following: 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, headache, changes in body weight and breast tenderness (usually settles after a couple of months). The pill 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 breast cancer in some women.

Mirena Intrauterine System (IUS)

What is a Mirena?
The Mirena is a small plastic T-shaped frame which is inserted into the womb. This carries the hormone in the sleeve around its stem and has 2 fine threads attached to the base. The hormone (progestogen) is identical to one of the hormones found in contraceptive pills.

How does it make my periods lighter?
The hormone in the sleeve is released gradually into the womb and makes the lining of the womb very thin, which in turn makes the periods much lighter. This is one of the best medical treatments for heavy periods.
Are there any side effects?

Whilst the Mirena is making the lining of the womb thin, many women experience light bleeding in between the 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 Mirena, this usually settles making the periods much lighter and shorter. You may find eventually that the periods stop altogether.

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. When the tube is removed, the Mirena stays inside the lining of the womb and the threads hang down through the cervix into the vagina. They do not interfere with making love 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?
Other side effects include fluid retention and weight gain in some women. Because of the prolonged action of the injection, which can be quite variable, you must be aware that it can (rarely) take up to 18 months for fertility to be restored.

Cyclical Progesterones (e.g. Duphaston or Norethisterone)

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 progesterones 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, 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 bad heart disease, progesterones 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 progesterones.

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.

If you have any further questions, please contact:
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■ Pre-assessment nurses..........01392 406530/1