

# IT'S YOUR HEALTH. OWN IT. PERIOD.

Know how long is too long for your period. Know if it may be due to a bleeding disorder so you can start to feel better.  
**It's Better You Know.**



NATIONAL  
**BLEEDING DISORDERS**  
FOUNDATION

## With all the new changes happening to your body, growing up can be both exciting and confusing.

One of the biggest changes your body will experience is getting your period, called menstruation. Every girl's experience with her period is different. Those just beginning to menstruate often have irregular periods that vary between light, moderate, and heavy flows.

**Your experience with your period might not be the same as your friends' experiences - everyone is different.**



### The What to Expect? The Facts.

#### **Girls' first periods**

typically happen between the ages of 11 and 14 years; some girls start as early as age 9 and others as late as age 15.

#### **In the first year or so**

a girl's period may last 4-7 days. It typically, comes every 21 to 45 days.

#### **The number of days**

from the start of one period to the day before the start of the next period is called your **menstrual cycle**.

#### **As you get older**

the average menstrual cycle is 28 days, but the range is 21 to 35 days.



#### **Tip for using this brochure:**

Not sure what some of the terms mean?

Words in **red** are explained in more detail in the Glossary.

## When to seek help...

KEEPING IN MIND THAT EVERY GIRL'S PERIOD CAN BE DIFFERENT, if you experience any of the symptoms below, it would be a good idea to talk to a doctor or nurse.

- ☐ Your period comes more frequently than every 21 days.
- ☐ Your period only comes once every 90 days or longer.
- ☐ Your period lasts longer than 7 days from the time it starts until the time it ends.
- ☐ You experience flooding or gushing blood that limits daily activities, such as school or exercise.
- ☐ You soak your pad or tampon every 1 to 2 hours or less on the heaviest day.
- ☐ You find or pass blood clots larger than a grape when changing your pad or tampon or you see it in the toilet bowl.

All of these are signs of irregular periods. The last four are all symptoms of **heavy menstrual bleeding (HMB)**. About 1 in 5 women have HMB. If left untreated, it can stop you from feeling your best and living life to its fullest.



## What are causes of HMB?

The cause is sometimes unknown but may be due to a number of medical conditions that can be tested for by a doctor. Understanding the cause of HMB will help you get the best treatment for your symptoms. This booklet will tell you all about bleeding disorders, which is one possible cause of HMB.

## What's a bleeding disorder?

A bleeding disorder is an **inheritable** lifelong condition in which a person tends to bleed longer before a blood clot forms to stop the bleeding.



Up to 1% of girls and women have a bleeding disorder in the United States, and many don't know it. That is about 2.7 million girls and women. If you have a bleeding disorder, you are not alone!

## Do you have ANY signs and symptoms of a bleeding disorder?



### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS RELATED TO YOUR PERIOD:

- ☐ HMB is the most common sign of a bleeding disorder in girls and women. There are other non-period related symptoms.



### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS NOT RELATED TO YOUR PERIOD:

- ☐ Bruising easily or for "no reason"
- ☐ Nosebleeds lasting longer than 10 minutes
- ☐ Bleeding from a cut or scrape that takes a long time to stop
- ☐ Heavy bleeding after a medical or dental procedure
- ☐ Low levels of iron in your blood or you've been treated for **anemia**\*
- ☐ A family member has a bleeding disorder or similar symptoms to you



Have you experienced  
**any** of these?



\*Low levels of iron may make you  
feel tired, fatigued, and weak.

If you checked even **ONE** of the signs and symptoms listed above, you may have a bleeding disorder.

Visit [www.betteryouknow.org/i-want-to-know-for-women](http://www.betteryouknow.org/i-want-to-know-for-women) to take a quiz to learn if you might have a bleeding disorder or if your HMB could be the result of something else.



## What do you do if you have ANY signs or symptoms of a bleeding disorder?

**Talk to someone.** It can feel strange, and sometimes scary, to talk about your period to others, but it's important that you figure out what's happening with your body. If there is a trusted adult in your life, find some quiet time to discuss your concerns with him or her.

**You can even use this brochure to get the conversation started!**

Work together with a trusted adult to make an appointment with a doctor or other healthcare provider, such as a **pediatrician**, nurse, **physician assistant**, or an **adolescent gynecologist**. Depending on your signs and symptoms, you may be referred to a **hematologist**.

## What if you don't have any other symptoms except HMB?

**A bleeding disorder is not the only thing that can cause HMB.** It could be the result of something else completely. To learn if you might have a bleeding disorder or if your HMB is the result of something else, visit [www.betteryouknow.org](http://www.betteryouknow.org). In either case, you or a trusted adult should follow up with a doctor or nurse.





## You've made the doctor's appointment. Here's what to expect and how to prepare:

- It may help to track your period and symptoms before your first appointment so you are ready to answer any questions. For more information, and a chart to help you track your periods and symptoms, visit [www.betteryouknow.org/women/at-risk/how-to-prepare](http://www.betteryouknow.org/women/at-risk/how-to-prepare).
- The doctor or nurse may ask you questions about your periods, any other symptoms you may have, and if members of your family have a history of symptoms.
- The doctor or nurse may take blood. This may be needed to test you for a bleeding disorder.
- The doctor or nurse may refer you to see a hematologist.

It's not unusual to feel a little (or a lot!) embarrassed to talk about periods, your body, and your personal life with someone you don't know very well. Doctors and nurses are used to having these kind of conversations, and their job is to make sure you are healthy. You can ask that your parent or guardian be with you during the conversation, or you can ask for privacy.

### In the meantime, here are some tips to help you handle your periods:

Keep an emergency bag of pads, panty liners and/or tampons, extra underwear and pants at school or to carry with you.

Have a long-sleeved sweater or jacket in your locker to tie around your waist (in case of accidents).

Put a doubled-up, dark-colored towel underneath you when you sleep or consider using thicker and longer pads for nighttime use.

Use disposable heating pads for cramps.

Apply water and a small amount of hydrogen peroxide to clothes to take out bloodstains in the laundry.

### It's important to know that bleeding disorders can be treated, allowing you to live a full life.

Find out if you are at risk, and take the first step in feeling better. Visit [www.betteryouknow.org](http://www.betteryouknow.org) to learn more.

## Glossary

Adolescent Gynecologist: An adolescent OB/GYN (obstetrician/gynecologist) is a doctor who focuses on the reproductive health of young women, and knows a lot about heavy periods.

Heavy menstrual bleeding (HMB): menstrual periods with abnormally heavy bleeding that can limit daily activities. If left untreated, HMB can place women and girls at an increased risk for health problems.

Hematologist: A hematologist is a doctor who treats diseases and disorders of the blood. However, hematologists are specialists, so your parent's or guardian's insurance may require a referral from your primary care doctor.

Inheritable: Inheritable means that a trait, quality, or characteristic can be passed down to you through your parents' genes. The genes for an inheritable bleeding disorder can be passed from one or both of your parents, depending on the type of bleeding disorder.

Anemia: Anemia means too few healthy red blood cells, which can make you feel tired, fatigued or weak. One type of anemia is called iron deficiency or too little iron in the body. It can be caused by your period if you experience heavy menstrual bleeding.

Menstrual Cycle: The number of days from the start of one period to the day before the start of the next period. Women and girls typically get 12 to 13 periods a year, although each cycle may not be exactly the same.

Pediatrician: A pediatrician is the doctor you see when you're feeling sick or need annual checkups as a child. They also know a lot about getting your first period.

Physician Assistant: A physician assistant usually works under the supervision of a doctor. She or he may meet with you first and order lab tests as well as provide treatment.





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