

Your GP Appointment

What to Prepare and What to Expect

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Talking about your period can be embarrassing. It's uncomfortable having to talk about how heavy your flow is, or how much blood you lose every month.

But here's what you should know: heavy bleeding is incredibly common. **1 in 4 women experience heavy periods** that restrict them to carry on with normal daily tasks. Some miss work, the gym, family outings, and even sex.

It's time to let go of the idea that heavy periods are the norm. There is help available, and it starts with a conversation between you and your doctor.

Before you see your GP it's always wise to be prepared. This ensures you get the most out of your visit, your questions answered and avoid walking out with regrets, so follow this guide to make the most of your visit.

Before your appointment

See your regular GP: If your doctor refers you to a specialist, all reports they create will be copied back to your original GP for follow up, so it makes sense to work with a GP you're comfortable with. However, if you don't have a regular GP, you should see the same doctor for the initial consultation and the follow up.

Plan ahead: It's best to plan your visit for a date when you don't have your period. However, if your period is causing you pain and distress, you should seek help immediately.

Allow enough time: It's best to make an appointment specifically to discuss your heavy periods. This gives you enough time to discuss your symptoms and answer any questions you might have. If you have other health issues to discuss, consider making a double appointment.

Be prepared: Your GP is likely to ask you a number of questions, so it's handy for you to have the answers ready. This will help your doctor understand your health situation better. Take note of your answers to the following;

- How regular are your periods?
- When was your last period and how long did it last?
- How many days did you have heavy bleeding?
- Do you have any irregular bleeding between cycles?
- How often do you change a pad or tampon on heavy days?
- How does the heavy bleeding impact on your lifestyle? For example, needing to take time off school, uni or work
- What are your pain levels? Even one day of bad pain each month is worth mentioning
- What is your mood over your cycle?
- Have your periods changed over recent months? If so how?

If you can bring 2–3 months' worth of answers to the questions above, it will help your doctor see any trends or patterns. You can just take notes on paper or consider using a free app to keep track.

Finally, make sure you write down any key questions you want answered.

During your appointment

Start the conversation right away: Your doctor has heard it all before, so there's no need to be embarrassed. Start by telling your doctor about your symptoms and concerns, rather than leaving it to the end of the appointment.

Don't be afraid to ask questions: Ask your GP about anything you may have read or heard. Most GPs know their patients will google their symptoms before the appointment. There are many myths out there and your GP can help put you on the right track.

Explain the impact heavy periods have on your life: Make sure you tell the doctor how your heavy bleeding impacts your life and your moods, as well as explain the physical symptoms. Your quality of life matters!

What to expect

As well as asking you general questions around your period and how it affects you, your doctor may perform or request a number of tests, including:

- a physical exam, which may include an internal exam
- a cervical screening test
- a blood test to check for iron deficiency
- an ultrasound
- check your blood pressure and heart rate

Don't be concerned if your doctor suggests a test for pregnancy or chlamydia – it's standard practice.

You may wish to download our comparison chart, which outlines the most common treatment options, to discuss with your doctor. Be prepared that you might not walk out of your appointment with a treatment plan. It's likely that your doctor will need more information before he or she can talk treatment options with you. However, your doctor should discuss the next step with you.

If the next step is not clear at the end of the appointment – Ask!

1. The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, Heavy Menstrual Bleeding Clinical Care Standards, October 2017.