

Starting your period

FAQ

By: Dr. Meghan Pike

1. How do I know if my period is too heavy?

One of the hardest things to do is to recognize whether your period is too heavy – and that's exactly why WeThrive was created! If you track your period using WeThrive, you will receive a score at the end of each cycle tracked. A score of 100 or more means you may have heavy periods.

Another way to check if your period is heavy is to do the Flow Check. A score on the Flow Check of 30 or greater indicates you may have heavy periods.

To get the WeThrive app go to:

Link to Apple store:

<https://apps.apple.com/ca/app/wethrive-period-tracking/id1591931941>

Link to Google store:

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.iwk.wethrive>

2. What does it mean if my period is heavy?

There are many different reasons why your period may be heavy. Sometimes, heavy periods can be a sign of an underlying inherited bleeding disorder (see question 3). Other times, heavy periods can be because of a problem with hormones, such as a thyroid disorder. This is what it is important to talk to your doctor if you have heavy periods. Know that you are not alone – almost one-third of people who menstruate report heavy periods at some point in their lives.

3. What is an inherited bleeding disorder? How do I know if I have an inherited bleeding disorder?

Your body is always in a balance of bleeding and clotting. When you bleed, your body will eventually make a clot to stop the bleeding. For people with an inherited bleeding disorder, it takes their body longer to make a clot to stop the bleeding. This means that they can bleed too much.

Making a clot needs a number of

different proteins (called clotting factors) and blood cells (called platelets) that are naturally present in the body. An inherited bleeding disorder is a condition where either the platelets are abnormal or the factors are decreased, abnormal or absent. This makes it hard for a person to stop bleeding and they continue to lose blood.

People living with inherited bleeding disorders can have a number of symptoms which may include heavy periods. Other symptoms may include frequent nose bleeds, easy bruising, oral cavity bleeding and excessive bleeding during and after surgery. That's why if you have heavy periods (or any of these other symptoms), you should talk to your doctor about the possibility of having an inherited bleeding disorder.

4. Can inherited bleeding disorders be treated?

Yes. There are a number of different treatments available for each inherited bleeding disorder. That is why it is important to talk to your doctor if you have heavy periods.

5. Are there treatments for heavy periods?

Yes! There are many different treatments available to help with heavy periods. Some are medications taken by mouth, and others are injections or something called an intrauterine system (IUS) which is placed into your vagina. Some are medications that contain hormones (such as the birth control pill), but some are not (e.g. tranexamic acid). Your treatment may vary depending on why you are having heavy periods (see question 2). Talk to your doctor about the treatment that is best for you. You should not have to live with heavy periods!

6. What should I do if I am concerned about my periods? How can I talk to my health care provider?

If you are concerned about your periods,

reach out to your Doctor. If you don't have a doctor, you can find a list of clinics near you on the WeThrive app. You can call a clinic and book an appointment. Some of the clinics offer virtual appointments and/or "walk-in" appointments, which means you can go to the clinic without a scheduled visit. You generally don't need to already have a doctor to be able to go to one of the clinics listed on WeThrive.

It can be hard to talk about periods. If you are comfortable, you can show your doctor the WeThrive app. The "Period Summary" page can be really helpful for doctors to look at and gives them a better idea of your periods. You can also provide them with the "Primary Care Provider Infographic" which is available for free download at the following link: <https://letstalkperiod.ca/primary-care-provider-resources/>

7. What colour is normal period blood?

It is normal for period blood to be a range of colours including black, dark brown, light brown, bright red, dark red, light pink, and dark pink.

8. When do periods start and stop?

Periods generally start between the ages of 9 and 14. The exact age at

which periods start can vary from one person to another. Periods generally stop around the ages of 40-50 years old (this is called menopause).

9. How long do periods last for?

On average a period lasts between 3 to 5 days. During the first few years after your first period, period length can vary. Some people get periods as short as 2 days or as long as 7 days.

10. What does it mean to have "regular" periods?

In general, periods last for 3 to 5 days every 21-35 days. However, a "regular" period is different amongst individuals. For example, one person may have a period that lasts 4 days every 22 days while another person may have a period that lasts 5 days every 30 days. Both of these are considered "regular." If you are always able to predict when your period is going to be and approximately how long it will last every time, your periods are probably "regular."

However, a lot of people have "irregular" periods. Irregular periods can mean that your period happens more or less often than every 21-35 days and/or lasts less than

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About the author: Dr. Meghan Pike is a second year subspecialty resident in Pediatric-Hematology Oncology at Dalhousie University/IWK Health Centre. She completed her pediatrics training at Dalhousie in 2020 after receiving her medical degree in 2017. Throughout her training, she has worked on creating and validating the Adolescent Menstrual Bleeding Questionnaire (aMBQ), designed to measure the impact of heavy menstrual bleeding on adolescent quality-of-life, which was recently published in RPTH. She secured a grant from the Canadian Hemophilia Society to develop an app to incorporate the aMBQ. The app, called WeThrive, can identify adolescents who have heavy menstrual bleeding. Dr. Pike's research interests include bleeding disorders, patient-reported outcome measures and advocacy for menstruators.





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3 days or more than 5 days. In general, “irregular” periods are unpredictable and you may not always be sure when your period is coming or how long they will last.

It is normal to have irregular periods in the first 2-3 years after your first period (called menarche). However, if you have regular periods before and now they are irregular, it is important to talk to your doctor about this.

11. What different menstrual products are available?

There are a variety of different menstrual products available, including sanitary pads (pad), panty liners, tampons, menstrual cups and period underwear.

12. How do I use a sanitary pad (pad)?

Most sanitary pads have instructions on the box. In general, most pads have adhesive that stick to the panties, while others have wings that wrap under the panties to keep the pad in place. Pads are generally changed every 4 to 8 hours. A disposable sanitary pad is not meant to be washed and reused. Some companies make reusable sanitary pads. These should be cleaned between each use by soaking in cold and mildly salty water. After soaking, it should be properly washed and dried in the sun.

You can sleep with a sanitary pad.

13. How do I use a tampon?

A tampon is a small piece of cotton that can be used to absorb period blood. Tampons are inserted directly into the vagina. Tampons can be inserted into the vagina with or without an applicator. An applicator can be made of cardboard or plastic.

Every tampon box contains instructions on how to use it. In general, make sure the tampon cotton is in the bigger tube of the applicator with the string hanging out of the smaller tube. With clean hands, hold the applicator between the thumb and the middle finger. Spread the legs and insert the free end of the bigger tube into the vagina. Press the narrow tube with the index finger pushing the tampon in place in the vagina. Remove the applicator while leaving the string of the tampon hanging out of the vagina. To remove, gently pull on the string to remove the cotton. If it hurts to pull out the cotton, you might need a smaller tampon (sometimes labeled as “light” absorbency). If you have blood on the string after you pull it out, you might need a bigger tampon (sometimes labeled as “super” absorbency).

Tampons should be changed every 4-6 hours. It is very important to change your tampon regularly.

Most people choose not to sleep with a

tampon in, as it has to be changed every 4-6 hours.

14. How do I use a menstrual cup?

Menstrual cups are containers made of soft rubber that are placed directly into the vagina to collect period blood. The rim of the cup forms a seal with the walls of the vagina to prevent leaking. Menstrual cups should be changed every 12 hours. To pull it out of the vagina, the stem at the base of the cup needs to be held tightly between the thumb and index finger then pulled out. Dispose period blood into the toilet. The cup can be rinsed with water and reused. Once your period is over, the cup can be reused for the next cycle after cleaning the cup with boiled water and drying it. Follow instructions on the box for details.

You can sleep with a menstrual cup.

15. How do I use period underwear?

Period underwear are leak proof underwear that can be worn while you are on your period. They are washable, reusable and made to feel as comfortable as your regular underwear or panties.

The underwear is made to absorb all of your period blood in a given day. There are different types of underwear that have different absorbencies. In general, you should be able to wear one pair of period underwear for the entire day. You can tell if it is full by looking at the seams and feeling if the seams are wet. If the seams are wet, it is probably time for a change.

To care for your period underwear, they should be washed in cold water and hung up to dry. One pair of underwear can last for about 40 washes (about 2 years).

You can sleep wearing period underwear.

16. How can I be prepared for my period?

Many people like to carry products with them a few days before their expected period start date. If you track your periods on WeThrive, you can use the calendar to see when to expect your next period. Keep a few products with you at all times leading up to this date. Your period summary will also include how many products (pads, tampon) you used during your last period, so that you can be prepared. Remember that the more periods you track on WeThrive, the more accurate your period prediction will be!

17. Can I take a bath when I'm on my period?

Can I swim while I'm on my period?

It is safe and clean to take baths while on your period. Some people find taking a bath comforting and it can sometimes help with menstrual cramps. You do not necessarily need to wear a menstrual product while taking a bath.

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It is safe and clean to swim while on your period. Some people choose to wear tampons instead of pads when they swim. If you are wondering how to use a tampon, see FAQ number 15.

18. Can I use WeThrive if I am 18 years or older?

You will still be able to use the menstrual tracking feature of the app. The score provided for your menstrual tracking is validated for identifying heavy periods regardless of age. However, if you are 18 years or older, you cannot rely on the score from the Flow Check. The Flow Check has only been validated for adolescents less than 18 years of age.

If you are 18 years of age or older, please visit the following website, Lets Talk Period, to complete the Self-BAT (Bleeding Assessment Tool), which has been validated for use in adults. This website was created by a Canadian hematologist (blood specialist), Dr. Paula James and contains useful information: www.letstalkperiod.ca