Period Problems Caused by Uterine Fibroids

Women with fibroids may experience heavy bleeding, a prolonged menstrual cycle or bleeding between periods.

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For almost 30% of women with uterine fibroids, the condition triggers unpleasant symptoms, such as heavy menstrual bleeding and painful or abnormally long periods that can last eight or more days.

“It’s a fact of life that women have menstrual periods,” says Yan Katsnelson, MD, a cardiovascular surgeon and the founder and CEO of USA Fibroids Centers, a national network of clinics specializing in treatments for the condition. “But it’s not normal to have a menstrual period that’s associated with heavy bleeding or that lasts two weeks.”

Experts at the clinic explain that because fibroids don’t allow the uterus to contract properly, the organ isn’t able to effectively stop the flow of menstrual blood. In addition, fibroids produce proteins known as growth factors that stimulate the blood vessels of the uterus. This in turn causes more blood to accumulate in the uterine cavity and leading to excessive bleeding and irregular menstrual cycles.

Fibroids may also cause heavy bleeding by raising the body’s level of prostaglandins. These hormonelike chemicals can widen blood vessels, which may contribute to excessive bleeding during the menstrual cycle.

A common gynecological problem, heavy menstrual bleeding affects women physically, psychologically, socially and professionally. Many with this problem are afraid to leave home because of the frequent need to change pads and tampons. Additionally, many women experience a decrease in work productivity and limit their social activities due to potential embarrassment.

“I couldn’t have a car that had cloth seats. I couldn’t leave the house without a change of clothes,” wrote award-winning journalist Tanika Valbrun, in an article published on VerywellHealth.com. “I had to stand at meetings because if I sat down, I might bleed through. And through all of that, nobody in my life talked about uterine fibroids, even though 80% of Black women will experience them before age 50.”

In 2014, Valbrun founded The White Dress Project, a nonprofit that supports women suffering from fibroids and raises awareness about the condition. She recalls that her periods were always heavy.

“Since I was 14, my menstrual cycles have been something to survive, not celebrate,” she says. “And it was years until I found out the reason why: Just like my mother, I have uterine fibroids.”

Valbrun shares that her mother’s response to fibroids was to accept, manage and minimize the symptoms. This normalization of the pain and suffering caused by fibroids motivated her to launch the women’s advocacy group.

Valbrum’s heavy menstrual bleeding gave rise to anemia—iron deficiency—another problem routinely faced by women with uterine fibroids. “Over the years, I had to have seven blood transfusions to combat blood loss,” she says.

Doctors at USA Fibroid Centers advise women who frequently feel tired and run-down to get themselves checked out, as these are symptoms of anemia. Additionally, they suggest that women whose irregular periods cause them mental or physical discomfort get examined for uterine fibroids or other underlying uterine conditions.

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