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1-800-994-9662

TDD: 1-888-220-5446

Bleeding Disorders



I am 25 years old and love to exercise, eat out, and go dancing. I've always bled heavily during my periods but never talked to a doctor about it. My mother

and sisters also have heavy periods, so I thought it was normal.

A few months ago I realized my period was interfering with my life. Every month I was afraid to go out with my friends when I had my period. I worried I would bleed through my pants. A lot of times I'd miss work and skip the gym because I felt so lousy.

So I decided to speak to my doctor. She ran some blood tests to rule out a bleeding disorder. At first, the test results came out normal. But my doctor repeated them to be sure.

The second time, the tests showed I had a bleeding disorder called von Willebrand disease. My doctor also found I had low levels of iron in my blood, or anemia. Now I take birth control pills to control my periods. Since I started taking the pill I bleed less and have a lot more energy. I'm also less self-conscious when I have my period. So going to work and hanging out with friends is more fun.

Q: What is a bleeding disorder?

A: A bleeding disorder is a health problem that makes it hard for a person to stop bleeding. Normally when a person is hurt, a clot forms to stop the bleeding quickly. This clotting process, called coagulation (koh-ag-yuh-LAY-shuhn), changes blood from a liquid to a solid state. For blood to clot, your body needs a type of blood cell called platelets. Your body also needs blood proteins called clotting factors.

In people with bleeding disorders, the platelets or clotting factors do not work in the right way or are in short supply. So, these people bleed longer than normal. With treatment people with bleeding disorders can lead full and active lives.

Bleeding disorders tend to run in families. Women normally bleed with menstruation and childbirth, so it may be hard to notice abnormal bleeding. In the United States, 1.5 to 4 million women have a bleeding disorder. And up to 2 million American women have a bleeding disorder and don't know it.

Q: Are there different types of bleeding disorders?

A: Yes, there are many kinds of bleeding disorders. The two most common are von Willebrand disease (VWD) and hemophilia (hee-muh-FIL-ee-uh).

Q: What is von Willebrand disease (VWD)?

A: VWD is the most common inherited bleeding disorder. It is caused by deficiencies or defects in a certain substance in the blood that helps clots to form. VWD occurs about as often in men as it does in women.



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Women with VWD may have:

- heavy and long menstrual periods (the most common symptom)
- easy bruising
- bleeding too much or for a long time after surgery or dental work
- bleeding too much after giving birth

Q: What is hemophilia?

A: Hemophilia is a well-known but rare bleeding disorder that runs in families. It is caused by an inherited genetic mutation. If men inherit this trait, they don't have enough clotting factors needed to stop bleeding. Women who inherit the trait are carriers of the disease — they do not have hemophilia, but they may pass the trait onto their children. Most women who are hemophilia carriers do not have symptoms. But some have mild bleeding symptoms, such as:

- heavy bleeding during periods
- bleeding too much or for a long time after dental work, surgery, serious injury, or childbirth

Q: How would I know if I had a bleeding disorder?

A: Some common symptoms of bleeding disorders include:

- very heavy periods (soaking through a pad or tampon every hour for 2 to 3 hours in a row or blood clots more than 1 inch in diameter)
- heavy bleeding from reproductive disorders that cause bleeding, such as endometriosis (EN-doh-MEE-tree-OH-suhss)

- large bruises from a minor bump or injury
- bleeding too much or for a long time
- nosebleeds that are hard to stop
- anemia

If you have any of these symptoms, talk with your doctor. Keep in mind that symptoms of bleeding disorders in women are often mild.

Q: Does heavy bleeding during my period mean I have a bleeding disorder?

A: Not always. Research shows that 5 – 20 percent of women with heavy periods have a bleeding disorder, usually VWD. In other cases, heavy periods may be caused by:

- hormonal changes
- diseases or disorders of the reproductive system
- use of an intrauterine (IN-truh-YOO-tur-in) device (IUD) for birth control
- use of some medicines

Even if heavy periods run in your family, it might still be a sign of a problem. So, if you have heavy menstrual bleeding, ask your doctor about testing for bleeding disorders.

Q: How are bleeding disorders diagnosed?

A: Blood tests are used to find out if you have a bleeding disorder and what type you have.

Your doctor will ask about your symptoms and any history of bleeding disorders in your family. Your doctor may perform a physical exam. If you are

