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Vaginal Bleeding (cont.)

What is abnormal vaginal bleeding?

Abnormal vaginal bleeding is a flow of blood from the vagina that occurs either at the wrong time during the month or in inappropriate amounts. In order to determine whether bleeding is abnormal, and its cause, the doctor must answer 3 questions: Is the woman pregnant? What is the pattern of the bleeding? Is she ovulating?

Every woman who thinks she has an irregular menstrual bleeding pattern should think carefully about the specific characteristics of her vaginal bleeding in order to help her doctor evaluate her particular situation. Her doctor will require the details of her history. Each category of menstrual disturbance has a particular list of causes, necessary testing, and treatment. Each type of abnormality is discussed individually below.

1. Is the woman pregnant?

Much of the abnormal vaginal bleeding during pregnancy occurs so early in the pregnancy that the woman doesn't realize she is pregnant. Therefore, irregular bleeding that is new may be a sign of very early pregnancy, even before a woman is aware of her condition.

2. What is the pattern of the bleeding?

The duration, interval, and amount of vaginal bleeding can suggest an abnormal condition.

An abnormal duration of menstrual bleeding can be either bleeding for too long of a period (hypermenorrhea) or too short of a period. (hypomenorrhea).

The interval of the bleeding can be abnormal in several ways. A woman's menstrual periods can occur too frequently (polymenorrhea) or too seldom (oligomenorrhea). Additionally, the duration can vary excessively from cycle to cycle (metrorrhagia).

The amount (volume) of bleeding can also be abnormal. A woman can either have too much bleeding (menorrhagia) or too little volume (hypomenorrhea).

3. Is the woman ovulating?

Usually, the ovary releases an egg every month in a process called ovulation. Normal ovulation is necessary for regular menstrual periods. There are certain clues that a woman is ovulating normally including regular menstrual intervals, vaginal mucus discharge halfway between menstrual cycles, and monthly symptoms including [breast](#) tenderness, fluid retention, [menstrual cramps](#), back pain, and mood changes. If necessary, doctors will order hormone blood tests (progesterone level), daily home body temperature testing, or rarely, a sampling of the lining of the uterus (endometrial sampling) to determine whether or not a woman is ovulating normally.

On the other hand, signs that a woman is not ovulating regularly include prolonged bleeding at irregular intervals after not having a menstrual period for several months, excessively low blood progesterone levels in the 2nd half of the menstrual cycle, and lack of the normal body temperature fluctuation during the time of expected ovulation. Sometimes, a doctor determines that a woman is not ovulating by sampling the lining of the uterus (endometrial sampling).

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