



## DECISION AID

### Heavy periods:

#### What are my treatment options?

If you are reading this, you probably have heavy periods. This means that you lose quite a lot more menstrual blood during your period than other women do. This can be a problem in daily life and lead to anemia, tiredness and listlessness.

There are various treatment options for heavy periods. Your doctor may also have advised you to have surgery to remove your womb (a hysterectomy). But it often isn't necessary to remove the womb.

The aim of this decision aid is to help you to make an informed decision after talking with your doctors.

#### THESE ARE THE TREATMENT OPTIONS:

- |                   |   |   |
|-------------------|---|---|
| <b>Medication</b> | [ | Painkillers: NSAIDs such as ibuprofen or diclofenac |
|                   |   | Anti-bleeding medication (tranexamic acid)          |
|                   |   | Hormones: Birth control pill or hormonal coil (IUD) |
| <b>Surgery</b>    | [ | Surgery to remove the lining of the womb            |
|                   |   | Surgery to remove the womb (hysterectomy)           |

*You can read about the pros and cons of these treatments on the next pages.*

There are also various things women can do to cope better with heavy periods in everyday life.

If you have iron anemia, you can take iron tablets.

Please note: This decision aid is not meant for women who have heavy periods because of fibroids in their womb. Other treatment options are available in that case.

#### Making an informed decision

This brief decision aid probably won't include all of the information that you need. You will still need to talk to a doctor, but the decision aid can help you. Your treatment decision will depend on various things, including

- how distressing your symptoms are,
- how the heavy periods affect you,
- how effective non-surgical treatments are,
- how old you are,
- whether you wish to have any (more) children,
- whether you would like to keep your womb, and
- whether you have any other medical conditions.

#### IMPORTANT:

Don't let anyone pressure you into choosing a certain treatment! Even if you find the symptoms very distressing, take the time to gather information and make the right decision for you.

## PROS AND CONS OF MEDICATION

	Painkillers	Anti-bleeding medication	Birth control pills	Hormonal coil (IUD)
<b>What does the treatment involve?</b>	Can be taken in the form of tablets if needed.	Tranexamic acid tablets are taken 3 times a day during your period.	Birth control pills are taken once a day. Either with a monthly break or continuously (without a break).	The hormonal coil is placed inside the womb, and can be left there for 3 to 5 years.
<b>Does it help?</b>	Can reduce pain and cramping. May also reduce the amount of blood lost, but are less effective than most of the other treatments.	This medication can reduce blood loss in women with heavy periods.	Periods become lighter. Women who take the pill continuously (without breaks) usually stop getting their period.	Women lose a lot less blood during their period, and often stop getting their period altogether. The hormonal coil is more effective than painkillers or the pill (when not taken continuously).
<b>What are the possible side effects?</b>	Stomach problems, nausea.	Headaches, tiredness, increased risk of thrombosis.	Fluid retention (edema), headaches, breast tenderness, higher risk of thrombosis.	Acne, spotting (vaginal bleeding between periods), mood swings and breast tenderness.
<b>Who is the treatment suitable for?</b>	For most women who have heavy periods.	For most women who have heavy periods.	For women who don't currently wish to become pregnant.	For women who don't currently wish to become pregnant.

## PROS AND CONS OF SURGICAL PROCEDURES

	<b>Surgery to remove the lining of the womb</b>	<b>Surgery to remove the womb (hysterectomy)</b>
<b>What does the operation involve?</b>	The tissue is removed with surgical instruments or destroyed, for instance using laser beams.	The womb is removed through a cut in the abdominal wall or through the vagina.
<b>Does it help?</b>	About 90 out of 100 women say that their period stopped or was lighter after the operation. But the lining of the womb sometimes grows back. In about 20 out of 100 women, the procedure is repeated within two years.	After a hysterectomy, you no longer have periods or the associated problems.
<b>What are the possible side effects?</b>	Injury to the wall of the womb, infections. Has fewer side effects than surgery to remove the womb.	Injury to abdominal organs (in about 5 out of 100 procedures). There are also general risks associated with surgery, such as infections or wound-healing problems.
<b>Could I still have children after the treatment?</b>	Women rarely become pregnant after this procedure. If they do, the pregnancy is associated with more risks.	No.
<b>Who is the surgery suitable for?</b>	For women who don't wish to have any (more) children.	For women who don't wish to have any (more) children. Hysterectomies are usually only considered if none of the other treatments have helped.

## HELP WITH YOUR DECISION

You may still be unsure about which treatment you would prefer. You can write down your thoughts and questions on the following two pages.

Which treatment would I consider?		What do I like about it?	What don't I like about it?
Painkillers	<input type="radio"/>		
Anti-bleeding medication	<input type="radio"/>		
Birth control pill	<input type="radio"/>		
Hormonal coil (IUD)	<input type="radio"/>		
Surgery to remove the lining of the womb	<input type="radio"/>		
Surgery to remove the womb (hysterectomy)	<input type="radio"/>		
No treatment	<input type="radio"/>		

### If you still aren't sure, what else do you need in order to make a decision?

With all the different pros and cons to consider, it can be hard to choose a treatment. One advantage of medications is that they may make it possible to avoid surgery. If they don't help, surgery is still an option.

If you need more help:

- You will find links to further information on the next page.
- You can talk to your doctor again.
- You can also talk to a different doctor. You will find information about this option on the next page, too.
- You can talk about it with your friends and family.
- You can contact a patient information center or a support group.

**You will find in-depth information about the following topics on the internet:**

- Heavy periods and the treatment options:  
[www.informedhealth.org/heavy-periods](http://www.informedhealth.org/heavy-periods)
- Uterine fibroids and their treatment options:  
[www.informedhealth.org/fibroids](http://www.informedhealth.org/fibroids)

## Preparing for the doctor's appointment

Do you still have any questions? What are you most concerned about? Write down any questions or thoughts you may have, and take this decision aid with you to the appointment. You can ask the doctor about anything you would like to know or discuss anything you are worried about.

You will find a list of questions – and can choose those that are most important to you – here:

- [www.informedhealth.org/questions](http://www.informedhealth.org/questions)



## **DECISION AID**

### **Heavy periods:**

What are my treatment options?

#### **Publishing details**

This decision aid was developed by the Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG, Germany). You will find information about our work and the sources we use here:

- [www.informedhealth.org/our-approach](http://www.informedhealth.org/our-approach)

Last updated: 05/2021