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# What is dysfunctional uterine bleeding?

On average, a healthy woman's menstrual cycle takes place every 24 to 35 days and the menstrual bleeding can persist for two to seven days<sup>1</sup>. A woman can be diagnosed as suffering from dysfunctional uterine bleeding (DUB), when these criteria are not met.<sup>1</sup>

Dysfunctional uterine bleeding is characterised by menstrual bleeding on days that do not fall within the normal menstrual cycle and can be caused by an imbalance in the sex hormones.<sup>2</sup>

Hormonal imbalances often occur when young girls start puberty and when women start experiencing menopause. This hormonal balance can persist for months, even years.<sup>2</sup>

## Signs of DUB are:

- infrequent or sporadic bleeding, outside of the normal menstrual cycle;<sup>2</sup>
- heavy bleeding, that can also contain blood clots;<sup>2</sup> and
- spotting, which is lighter than a normal menstrual period and often appears brown, pink, or light red.<sup>2</sup>

## What causes DUB?

The most common cause of abnormal uterine bleeding is hormonal.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes in girls going through puberty and woman starting menopause, the endometrium can build up too much, resulting in an irregular or heavy period or spotting between periods.<sup>3</sup>

## Other factors that affect your hormones:

- birth control pills, some medicines, as well as hormone therapy;<sup>3</sup>
- rapid weight loss or gain;<sup>3</sup>
- emotional or physical stress;<sup>3</sup>
- an intrauterine device (IUD);<sup>3</sup> and
- polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).<sup>3</sup>



DUB can also result from the following, less common, conditions: bleeding or clotting disorders; cancer of the cervix, endometrium or uterus; illness that affect kidneys, liver, thyroid or adrenal glands; infection of the cervix or endometrium; and sexually transmitted diseases<sup>3</sup>.

## How is DUB diagnosed?

It will help your doctor with a diagnosis if you take notes during a few consecutive cycles, detailing specific symptoms.<sup>3</sup> Your doctor will want to know about your overall health, carry out a pregnancy test, as well as conduct a physical examination, including the procedures below.<sup>3</sup>

- A blood test will be conducted to test if your body is short of iron, which can be caused by heavy bleeding. A blood test will also determine whether your hormones are functioning as they should be, whether you have a chronic illness or a blood disorder.<sup>3</sup>
- A doctor will inspect the images that an ultrasound takes of the inside of your uterus to look for fibroids or polyps.<sup>3</sup>
- The doctor will look into your uterus by way of a hysteroscopy which involves inserting a tiny, lighted scope through your cervix, into your uterus.<sup>3</sup>
- The doctor may conduct a biopsy which involves removing a small piece of tissue which will be examined under a microscope for abnormal cells.<sup>3</sup>
- Magnetic resonance imaging makes detailed pictures of your uterus. While this is not often used, it can help spot adenomyosis.<sup>3</sup>



## How can DUB be treated?

The correct treatment of DUB often depends on why excessive bleeding.<sup>2</sup> If DUB is experienced at the onset of puberty, often no action is taken as hormonal imbalances can eventually correct themselves.<sup>2</sup>

If you are not trying to fall pregnant, your doctor may recommend one of two contraceptive methods to regulate and control the menstrual cycle.<sup>2</sup> The first is combination oral contraceptives, which contain both synthetic oestrogen and progesterone, and are most commonly used.<sup>2</sup> The second is the use of progestin IUDs or progestin implant to regulate hormonal imbalances.<sup>2</sup>

Sudden, heavy bleeding can be treated using intravenous oestrogen.<sup>2</sup> Once the bleeding has stopped, this treatment could be followed by oral progestin to balance hormones.<sup>2</sup>

If you're trying to conceive, stimulating ovulation, using an ovulation-stimulating drug can stop prolonged menstrual bleeding by resetting your menstrual cycle.<sup>2</sup>

A procedure called dilation and curettage, or D&C, is a surgical procedure that removes some of the uterine lining and is sometimes used to treat heavy and prolonged bleeding accompanied by a thickened uterine lining.<sup>2</sup>

Your doctor may order an additional biopsy if your uterine cells are found to be abnormal.<sup>2</sup> A hysterectomy, which involves the complete removal of the uterus, may be recommended if the biopsy shows that the cells are cancerous; however, this is usually a last resort.<sup>2</sup>



# Take care of your health, take control of your life.

**References:** 1. Chin. J. Obstet, Gynecol. Clinical Guidelines for Diagnosis and Treatment of Dysfunctional Uterine Bleeding. March 2009, Vol. 44, No. 3, 234-236.  
2. April Kahn, What You Should Know About Dysfunctional Uterine Bleeding, updated 15 March 2021. <https://www.healthline.com/health/dysfunctional-uterine-bleeding-dub>. Accessed 20 October 2021. 3. Stephanie Langmaid, Abnormal Uterine Bleeding, WebMD, reviewed 22 September 2020, <https://www.webmd.com/women/abnormal-uterine-bleeding#2-4>. Accessed 20 October 2021.

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