

Information for Patients

There are two surgical procedures which have in the past been used to investigate and treat heavy periods. The first, dilation and curettage, was used to establish the cause of heavy periods, but today, the medical evidence tells us this procedure is inappropriate and should not be routinely carried out. The second procedure, a hysterectomy which removes a woman's womb and therefore ends menstruation completely, can be carried out, but only when specific criteria are met and alternative treatments have been tried first.

About the condition

Heavy periods are common and can have a significant effect on a woman's everyday life. In about half of women, no underlying reason is found. But, there are several conditions and some treatments that can cause heavy menstrual bleeding, so you should discuss your symptoms with a clinician if you are concerned.

It's important you and your doctor make a shared decision about what's best for you if your heavy periods are becoming a problem. When deciding what's best you should both consider the benefits, the risks, the alternatives and what will happen if you do nothing.

What are the **BENEFITS** of the intervention?

There are no diagnostic or treatment benefits with dilation and curettage. A hysterectomy for patients with heavy periods should only be considered in certain circumstances.

What are the **RISKS** of the intervention?

Complications following dilation and curettage are rare, but can include uterine perforation, infection, damaging your cervix. A hysterectomy is a significant operation and therefore inevitably carries a small risk of blood loss or complications from the anaesthetic. Other risks include infection, or a prolapse in later years. It may also cause the early onset of your menopause and should only be considered if you definitely don't want to have children as your periods will be permanently ended.

What are the **ALTERNATIVES**?

A doctor will usually use an ultrasound scan or an instrument which takes a small sample of the lining of your womb to see what's causing your heavy periods. There are a number of alternative treatment options including hormone treatment and a coil that provides contraception and are good at reducing blood loss.

What if you do **NOTHING**?

Doing nothing is not likely to be harmful. However, if heavy periods are having a significant impact on your life, you should seek medical advice to identify the underlying cause and discuss treatment options.

You can find out more about the [NHS Evidence Based Interventions](#) programme online.