

## **I've had my period for three straight months!** <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

I have been having this problem where my period will not stop. My period is usually not regular ? I won't have one for about two months and then I will have one for about a-month-and-half, but this time it is hasn't stopped for three months now. What do you think I should do? I would really love to know what is wrong.

### **Answer**

Dear Reader,

Vaginal bleeding for three continual months is atypical and a good indicator that it's time to see a health care provider. The average length of a menstrual cycle is 28 days, although 21 to 35 day cycles are common. Menstrual blood flow usually lasts for five to seven days. To learn more about why you've had continual bleeding for so long, it's recommended to schedule a visit to a gynecologist or a nurse practitioner who specializes in women's health.

Many people visit their OB/GYN, family practitioner, or women's health care specialist annually for check ups. When someone develops a problem or has unusual symptoms, such as prolonged bleeding, there is no need to wait for the annual appointment. To help your provider determine a diagnosis, it's a good idea to record information about the prolonged and/or irregular bleeding and cycles you've experienced ? i.e., when it occurs, how heavy or light the menstrual flow is, whether or not you experience any pain, such as cramps, and any other accompanying symptoms, such as fever or nausea. To find out what's going on, a provider will most likely focus on your medical history; do a physical exam, including a pelvic exam; order a blood test; and, perform some other diagnostic tests.

Menorrhagia is the term used to describe menstrual bleeding characterized by heavy flow and/or prolonged duration. Heavy flow lasting more than seven days but occurring with regular monthly periods may be normal for some people. However, menorrhagia is a symptom, which is commonly associated with an underlying condition.

Menorrhagia is often associated with:

- Irregular menstrual periods
- Passage of large blood clots
- Menstrual bleeding that soaks through one or more sanitary pads or tampons every hour for several consecutive hours

- Disruption of a your usual lifestyle activities
- Pain in the lower abdominal area during a period

Possible causes of menorrhagia include:

- Hormonal imbalances (especially estrogen and progesterone)
- Anemia or blood clotting disorders
- Fibroids, cysts, polyps, or tumors of the cervix or uterus
- Certain birth control devices (such as an intrauterine device ? IUD)
- Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)
- Abnormal pregnancy (a miscarriage, for example)

A health care provider can help you consider your symptoms, determine a diagnosis, and discuss a treatment plan that will work for you. Having bleeding for such a long time may be frustrating or concerning; fortunately seeing a health care provider can help get you on the track toward an effective treatment and more regular cycles. Take care,

Alice!

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