



NAVIGATING MID-LIFE CHANGES

By Natalia Dvorak, MD

As inconvenient as it can sometimes be, a woman's monthly menstrual cycle provides a window into the changes that occur to her reproductive system as she ages. Such changes can be expected and should be discussed with your gynecologist during your annual visit.

The most common change that women experience is irregular menstrual periods. The cycles can shorten or lengthen, and the number of days that menstruation occurs can lengthen. Heavy menstrual bleeding can be disturbing. Sometimes this bleeding can get so heavy that large clots are passed, and women cannot continue to take care of their professional and personal responsibilities.

Menstrual changes are caused by many different things. These include normal hormonal changes in our 30s and 40s, and changes related to menopause in our late 40s and early 50s. Also, changes in the thyroid hormone can cause problems with menstruation.

Sometimes growths within the uterus, such as fibroids and polyps, can cause abnormal bleeding. Adenomyosis, which

is characterized by the glandular tissue that lines the inside of the uterus invading into the muscle wall of the uterus, occurs commonly as we age. Uterine cancer is the rarest, but most dangerous, source of irregular spotting and heavy menstrual bleeding.

A history and physical exam with your gynecologist is the first step to figuring out the problem. An ultrasound is usually necessary as well as blood tests. If the doctor is concerned about cancer, they will do a biopsy of the lining of the uterus.

The treatment of problematic menstrual bleeding depends on its cause. If the problem is hormonal, it can often be controlled with medications. However, if the bleeding is due to growths, medication will not sufficiently help and surgery is necessary to remove the growths. A common surgery is hysteroscopy, where we look inside the uterus with a camera and remove any polyps or fibroids. Endometrial ablation, where heat is used to destroy the cells that cause menstrual bleeding, is often added. These are outpatient procedures, and women recover from them very quickly and with very little pain.

There are things you can do to prepare for your doctor's visit. Keep a log of your bleeding as the pattern of bleeding can help us determine the cause. If you're bleeding more than normal, take an over-the-counter iron supplement to replenish what your body is losing. A daily multivitamin is helpful as well, as is a well-rounded diet.



The 20/20 LifeStyles Daily Pack with Iron is optimal for pre-menopausal women.

Very importantly, if you ever have bleeding after going through menopause, please see your doctor immediately. There are many causes of post-menopausal bleeding other than cancer, but it's important to make sure cancer is not present.

Your gynecologist or primary care doctor is your partner in maintaining your good health. Regular visits can catch problems before they become dangerous, requiring blood transfusion or hysterectomy. Working together, you can navigate and smooth out your mid-life changes.

MEET THE EXPERT NATALIA DVORAK, MD



Dr. Natalia Dvorak is board-certified in Obstetrics and Gynecology. Her special interests include infertility, adolescent medicine, and high risk obstetrics. She specializes in minimally invasive surgical techniques. Dr. Dvorak is committed to providing personalized care and maintaining long-term relationships with her patients.

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