

New Options for Women with Problem Periods; Endometrial Ablation Offers Freedom from Lifestyle-Restricting Condition

By Dr. Catherine Bernardini

At least one in five women in Pennsylvania and across the country suffers from problem periods yet most do not seek treatment. Problem periods, characterized by heavy, prolonged bleeding that impacts a woman's quality of life, affect more than ten million women in the U.S. Symptoms range from chronic fatigue and anemia to embarrassing accidents and restricted activity, causing major lifestyle changes that wreak havoc on women's personal and professional lives.

Many women that suffer from problem periods don't recognize their symptoms may be a result of a known and treatable condition (clinical term is menorrhagia); others are too embarrassed to discuss the problem with friends, family or even their physicians. In my practice, I see many women suffering unnecessarily from problem periods, but the good news for these women is that there are minimally invasive and effective treatments available.

In the past, women with problem periods were typically offered treatments ranging from drug therapy to hysterectomy. However, for women with problem periods caused by benign reasons (i.e. hormonal changes, genetic bleeding disorders, etc.), these treatments often prove ineffective (hormone therapy is effective only 50 percent of the time) or unnecessarily invasive. There is also a significant portion of women contraindicated for hormone therapy as well as those who can not tolerate its side (i.e. headaches, weight gain and nausea). Dilation and curettage (D&C) is only effective for 15 percent of women and is often a temporary solution. Surprisingly, hysterectomy, the most invasive treatment requiring the lengthiest recovery time, remains a popular technique to alleviate problem periods.

Today, physicians have safe, effective and fast alternatives for women who have completed their families and no longer want to suffer from uncomfortable symptoms and lifestyle restrictions that accompany problem periods. Treatments such as endometrial ablation, which permanently removes the lining of the uterus, are changing women's lives by reducing or altogether eliminating their problem periods. In May 2007, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) issued revised guidelines about who should be considered for endometrial ablation. They conclude that endometrial ablation should be considered as a first-line treatment for women with "perceived heavy menstrual bleeding."

If you have problem periods that prevent you from doing the things you love, talk to your gynecologist—fast, easy treatment options are available and can quite literally change your life. The NovaSure System, the most widely used endometrial ablation technique, is a 90-second outpatient procedure that can be performed under any anesthesia protocol and at any time during a woman's cycle. Most of my NovaSure patients have returned to work a few days after the procedure, whereas, a hysterectomy often requires recovery time of up to two months. I estimate that 95 percent of the women I have treated with NovaSure had successful outcomes with very little time taken out of their lives.

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