

# Chapter 22

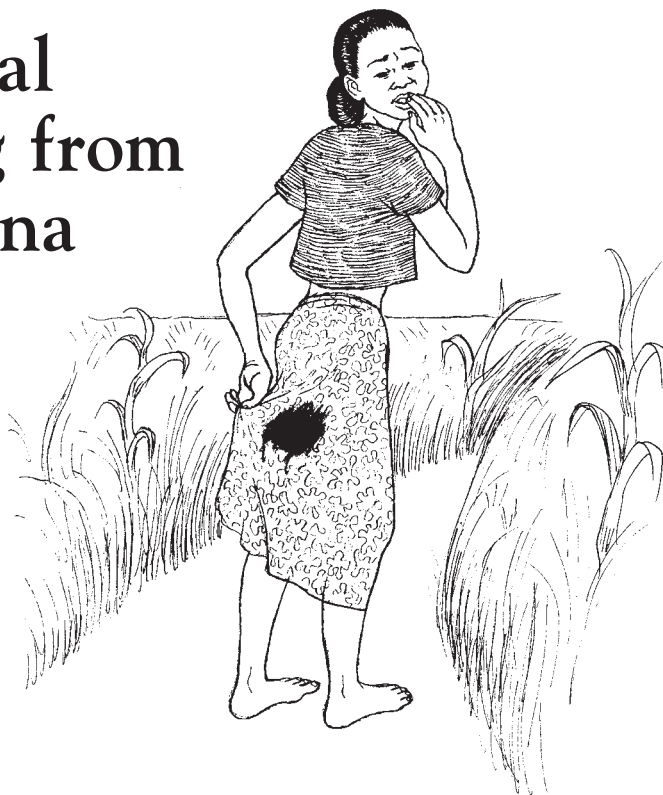
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## How to use this chapter:

Most of the causes of the bleeding problems in this chapter are described in other parts of this book. If you have a bleeding problem, look it up here and then turn to the numbered page listed for more information. If the problem is not covered in this book, see a health worker trained to do pelvic exams.

# Abnormal Bleeding from the Vagina



It is normal for *monthly bleeding* to change from time to time because of illness, stress, pregnancy, breastfeeding, a long journey, overwork, or a change in diet. But if a change in monthly bleeding happens suddenly, lasts more than a few months, or if it comes with other problems, it may be a sign of a more serious problem.

► If monthly bleeding suddenly changes, always think about the possibility of pregnancy—even if a family planning method is being used.

## Danger signs

If a woman has any of these danger signs, she may need medical help right away. Turn to the numbered page listed for more information.

- bleeding and pain in the abdomen when regular monthly bleeding has been missed (page 73)
- bleeding in late pregnancy (page 74)
- heavy bleeding after childbirth, *miscarriage*, or *abortion* (pages 92, 234, and 251)



monthly bleeding



pregnancy

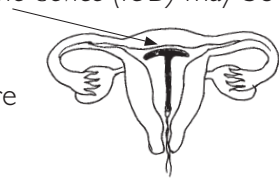
## Problems with Monthly Bleeding

### HEAVY MONTHLY BLEEDING, OR BLEEDING THAT LASTS A LONG TIME

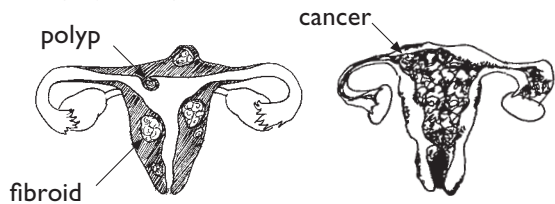
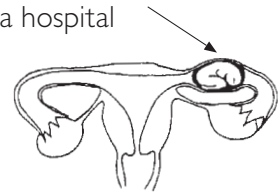
- Monthly bleeding is heavy if a pad or cloth is soaked through in less than one hour.
- Monthly bleeding is long if it lasts for more than 8 days.
- Blood clots (soft, dark red, shiny lumps in the blood that look like liver) are also a sign of heavy bleeding.
- Heavy bleeding that goes on for many weeks, months or years can cause weak blood (*anemia*, see page 172).

#### Causes:

- The *hormones* may be out of balance so the *ovary* does not release an egg. This is common for women under 20 and women over 40 years of age (see page 47).
- An *intra-uterine device (IUD)* may be making monthly bleeding more heavy (see page 216).
- *Miscarriage*, even if you did not think you were pregnant (see pages 98 and 234).



- If you have pain in the abdomen with bleeding, you may have a pregnancy outside the womb in the tube. **URGENT.** Go to a hospital right away (see page 73).
- You may have a problem with the *thyroid gland*.
- You may have growths (*fibroids* or *polyps*) or *cancer* in your womb (see page 380).



**IMPORTANT** See a health worker trained to do pelvic exams if you have heavy bleeding and:

- *blood gushes from your vagina.*
- *monthly bleeding has been heavy and long for 3 months.*
- *you think you might be pregnant.*
- *you have severe pain with the bleeding.*

### LIGHT MONTHLY BLEEDING

Light bleeding each month is not a health problem.

#### Causes:

- Some family planning methods—like injections, *implants*, and the pill—can make you bleed less after you have been using them for some time.
- Your ovaries may not have released an egg.



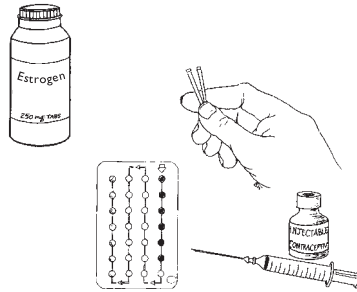
family planning,  
changes in bleeding

## MONTHLY BLEEDING THAT COMES TOO OFTEN, OR BLEEDING AT OTHER TIMES

Something may be wrong if monthly bleeding comes more often than every 3 weeks, or if it comes and goes without a regular pattern.

### Causes:

- The ovary may not have released an egg (see page 48).
- There may be growths (fibroids or polyps) or cancer in the womb, especially if monthly bleeding is heavy and not regular (see page 380).
- Taking the medicine called estrogen after menopause (see page 124).
- Some family planning methods—like the pill, implants, and injections—might cause you to bleed more often (see pages 208, 213, and 214).



► Hormonal family planning methods such as pills, implants, or injections, can change monthly bleeding.

## WHEN MONTHLY BLEEDINGS COME TOO FAR APART, OR HAVE STOPPED

Monthly bleeding usually comes about every 21 to 35 days. It may be normal to have an even longer time between bleeding. But something may be wrong, or you may be pregnant, if your monthly bleeding does not come at all.

### Causes:

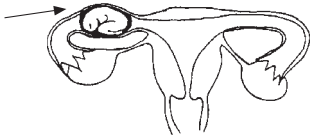
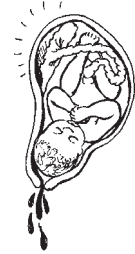


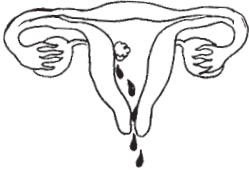
- You may be pregnant (see page 67).
- You may be having a miscarriage (see page 98).
- The ovary may not have released an egg (see page 231).
- You may have a serious illness—like *malaria*, *tuberculosis* (see page 387) or a worsening *HIV infection* (see page 283).
- If you are over 40 or 45, you may be nearing menopause (see page 124).
- Some family planning methods—like the pill, injections, and implants—can make monthly bleedings come far apart (see pages 208, 213, and 214).
- Poor nutrition may change monthly bleeding (see page 172).



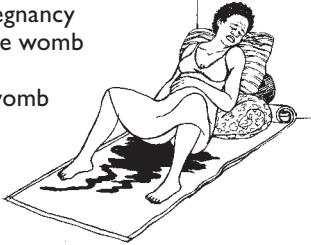
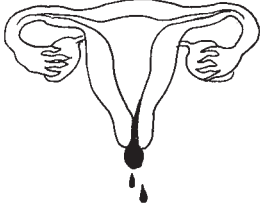
When a woman grows older, her monthly cycle changes.

► If you are over 18 and have never had a monthly period, get medical help.

## Other Kinds of Bleeding Problems

BLEEDING DURING PREGNANCY OR AFTER CHILDBIRTH			
Bleeding problem	May be caused by	What to do	See page
Bleeding during the first 3 months of pregnancy with constant pain or pain that comes and goes	<p><i>pregnancy in the tube</i></p> 	URGENT! Go to a hospital right away.	73
Bleeding during the last 3 months of pregnancy	<p>the afterbirth (<i>placenta</i>) is coming off the wall of the <i>womb</i></p> <p>the <i>placenta</i> is covering the <i>cervix</i></p> 	URGENT! Go to a hospital right away.	74
Bleeding during the first 6 months of pregnancy	<p>may be a <i>miscarriage</i> (especially if you also have <i>cramping</i> pains like birth pains)</p> 	Watch and wait. If bleeding becomes heavy, go to a hospital.	98
Heavy bleeding during or just after childbirth	<p>pieces of the <i>placenta</i> are left in the <i>womb</i></p> <p>the <i>womb</i> is too tired to squeeze or tighten</p> 	URGENT! See a midwife or go to a hospital if bleeding is heavy.	92
Light, pink bleeding during the first 3 months of pregnancy without pain	<p>this can be normal, or it may be a sign of early <i>miscarriage</i></p>	See 'bleeding early in pregnancy'.	74
Spotting or light bleeding instead of your normal monthly bleeding	<p>the developing baby (<i>fetus</i>) is attaching to the wall of the <i>womb</i> (<i>implantation</i>). This is normal.</p> 	See the chapter on "Pregnancy and Childbirth."	67

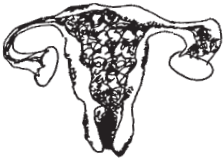
**BLEEDING AFTER AN ABORTION OR MISCARRIAGE**

<b>Bleeding problem</b>	<b>May be caused by</b>	<b>What to do</b>	<b>See page</b>
Heavy bleeding, or bleeding that lasts longer than 15 days, or bleeding with pain or fever	pieces of the pregnancy may still be in the womb  <i>infection</i> in the womb  	Go to a hospital or clinic right away.	251  255
Bleeding like a normal monthly bleeding, but lasting 5 to 15 days, getting lighter and lighter	this is normal  	See 'what to expect after an abortion'.	249

**BLEEDING AFTER SEX**

<b>Bleeding problem</b>	<b>May be caused by</b>	<b>What to do</b>	<b>See page</b>
Bleeding during or after sex	<i>sexually transmitted infection (STI)</i>	See 'gonorrhea and chlamydia'.	267
	<i>pelvic inflammatory disease</i>	See 'PID'.	274
	forced sex	See 'Rape.'	327
	growths or cancer of the cervix or womb	See 'cancer of the cervix' and 'problems of the womb'.	377 380

**BLEEDING AFTER MENOPAUSE**

<b>Bleeding problem</b>	<b>May be caused by</b>	<b>What to do</b>	<b>See page</b>
Bleeding that begins 12 months or more after menopause	growths or cancer of the womb  growths or cancer of the cervix  	See a health worker trained to do a pelvic exam.  You may need to have a Pap test or a <i>D and C</i> .	380  377