

Your Journey with Abnormal Uterine Bleeding



For more information scan this QR code or go to myhealth.alberta.ca/abnormal-uterine-bleeding-pathway

Abnormal uterine bleeding is irregular bleeding from the uterus. It may be bleeding that is heavier, lighter, or lasts longer than your usual period. Or it may be bleeding that doesn't occur at your regular time. If you recently gave birth, had a pregnancy end, or use an IUD, this information may not apply for you.

You are the most important part of your healthcare team. This guide will help you to know what to expect as you work with your healthcare team to manage and treat your abnormal uterine bleeding. If you have any questions along the way, please ask your healthcare team. Click on the page numbers in blue if you want more information about the step in your journey.

Before your appointment (page 5)

- Write down how you feel, your questions, symptoms, and concerns.
- Symptoms you may have are periods that happen more or less often, seem lighter or heavier than normal, or last longer and may also include bleeding when you don't expect it, such as between periods or after sex.



Visit your healthcare provider (page 6)

- Consider bringing a family member or friend to support you.
- Share all of your symptoms and concerns. Your health includes physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, and social elements.
- In order to better manage your health condition, your healthcare provider needs to hear from you and understand who you are and what matters to you.



Get your tests (page 7)

Your tests and assessments may include:

- Internal pelvic exam
- Urine test
- Pap test
- Internal ultrasound
- Blood tests
- Biopsy of your uterus



Review your test results (page 8)

- You may find some of your test results on MyHealth Records or MyAHS Connect (myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords).
- Talk with your healthcare provider so you know what your test and assessment results mean and how they will help your team and you decide what to do next.



Review your treatment & management options (page 9)

- There are many ways to help treat and manage abnormal uterine bleeding.
- Talk with your healthcare team to determine what is best for you, such as:
 - Medication that can help reduce your bleeding and manage your pain
 - Hysteroscopy - This procedure can remove polyps or fibroids
 - Surgery if other treatments do not work



Talk with your healthcare provider about a referral (page 10)

- Not all patients need a referral to see a specialist.
- A referral is determined based on your symptoms, test results, your history, and your age.



Start your treatment & watch your symptoms (page 11)

- **Call 811 if you have any of the following symptoms:** soaking a high-protection pad, tampon, or menstrual cup every hour for more than 2 hours; passing clots larger than a loonie; feeling dizzy, weak or feverish; having very bad abdominal pain.
- Any change in your menstrual pattern or amount of bleeding that affects your daily life should be checked by your healthcare team.
- If you have a change in symptoms or notice a new symptom, consider keeping a menstrual diary to track your symptoms.



Keep taking care of yourself (page 12)

- Keep taking care of your overall health.
- Look for other healthy-lifestyle resources and supports.



Whole-person health (page 2)

Important Tips:

Need a family doctor?

ahs.ca/findadoctor

Need health advice?

Call Health Link at 811

Need to find programs and services in your community?

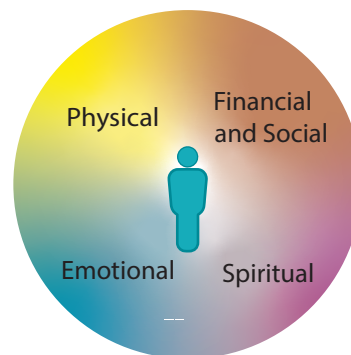
Call 211 or visit ab.211.ca

Whole-person health

The whole-person health approach will help you and your healthcare team better manage your health condition. It is drawn from the teachings of the Medicine Wheel.

Whole-person health means thinking about all parts of your health and wellness: physical, financial and social, spiritual, and emotional. All of these parts are connected and influence each other. It's important to be aware of your personal needs in each part and to share that information with your healthcare team.

- **Physical:** your specific health conditions and how well your body works
- **Financial and Social:** your ability to meet your housing, transportation, food, and health needs, feeling supported to manage your daily life, and having meaningful relationships
- **Spiritual:** your beliefs, sense of connection, and purpose
- **Emotional:** how you think, feel, and cope with life events



Whole-person health

Whole-person health also reminds us that we are all connected and work together: you, your support systems, and your healthcare providers. Your healthcare providers could be your doctor, nurse practitioner, or a team that comes together with you to plan and organize your care.

Your healthcare provider needs to understand who you are and what matters to you. This helps to build trust. But it can be hard to know what to share or what to say. Try starting by asking yourself:

“What are the things in my life that are important to me?”

“What are the things in my life that may be affecting my health and well-being?”



Continued on next page.

Bringing forward what matters to you is important. Here are some examples of things you may want to talk about with your healthcare provider:



Physical

“My symptoms are making it hard for me to do my job.”

“Because of my pain, it’s hard to take care of myself.”

Financial and Social

“I’m worried I won’t be able to get to all of my appointments.”

“I need my daughter with me as a translator.”

“I’m not sure how I will pay for my medicines this month.”

Emotional

“I’m lonely and have no one to talk to.”

“I have a lot of stress and I’m not sure how to manage it.”

“Ever since my friend died, I’ve been struggling with my feelings.”

Spiritual

“It’s important that I follow traditional healing practices.”

“It’s important that my religious practice is respected and brought into my care.”

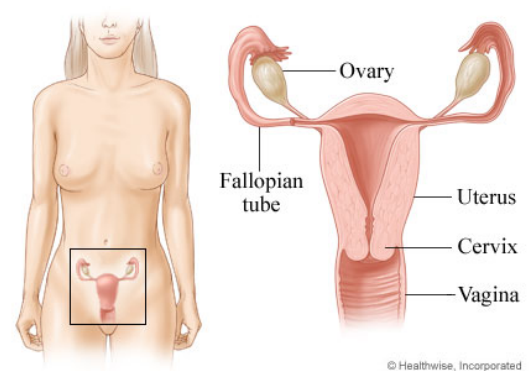
What is abnormal uterine bleeding?

Abnormal uterine bleeding is menstrual bleeding that is not normal for you.

The uterus is a hollow, pear-shaped organ in the lower abdomen. About once a month, the lining of the uterus thickens. If a pregnancy doesn't occur, the uterus sheds its lining as a menstrual period. In a normal menstrual cycle, bleeding usually happens every 24 to 38 days.

Under normal circumstances, the uterus sheds a small amount of blood during each menstrual period (less than 5 tablespoons or 80 mL). Bleeding that occurs when not expected in the menstrual cycle or large amounts of blood during a regular menstrual cycle is considered to be abnormal uterine bleeding.

Once a person who is not taking hormone therapy enters menopause and the menstrual cycles have ended, any uterine bleeding is considered abnormal.



What causes abnormal uterine bleeding?

There can be many causes, including:

- Abnormal changes in hormone levels
- Problems such as growths in the uterus or clotting problems
- In rare cases, it may be caused by a more serious problem, such as cancer
- Sometimes the cause of the bleeding isn't known

Reference: myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=aa76597#acl7061

Before your appointment(s)

Everyone will have their own unique journey with abnormal uterine bleeding. How you move through your journey, the number of visits with your healthcare team, the steps you will take, and the order you take them in will depend on your individual needs and will be decided in partnership with your healthcare team. Always follow the specific recommendations from your healthcare team.

Here are a few tips to help you get ready for your appointment(s) with your healthcare provider:

- Consider using a symptom tracker to capture important information to share with your healthcare team about your symptoms.
- A symptom tracker can help you remember what symptom you're feeling, when it started, how often it happens, if the symptom changes, and what makes your symptoms better or worse.
- **Common symptoms you may have with abnormal uterine bleeding are:**
 - **Periods that happen more or less often**
 - **Periods that seem lighter or heavier than is normal for you**
 - **Periods that last longer than is normal for you**
 - **Bleeding when you don't expect it, such as between periods or after sex**
- Ask someone you trust to go with you to your appointment. They can help you ask questions, write down instructions, and remember explanations.



Helpful tools and resources

- **Menstrual Diary:** myhealth.alberta.ca/health/Pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=aa151402
- **Symptom tracker (HQCA):** hqca.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/HQCA-Symptom-Tracker-March-23-2022.pdf

To get the most out of your visit, plan to write notes during the visit or record the conversation using your phone's voice recorder or the Alberta Health Services My Care Conversations app at ahs.ca/careapp.



Your healthcare provider will review your history of symptoms and menstrual periods. They may ask how often, how long, and how much you have been bleeding. Having a completed symptom tracker will be helpful.

What should I share with my healthcare provider?

- What impact the bleeding is having on things that are important to you, like your job, hobbies and interests, and relationships. It's important to talk about these things with your healthcare provider because they all play a role in your health and well-being.
- You are the most important part of your healthcare team.
- If you don't understand what your healthcare team is telling you, let them know right away. Be open and honest.

You might say:

"This is new to me. Could you please explain it slowly, using language that is easier to understand?"

"It sounded like you said that I should... Did I understand that correctly?"

"Can you show me a picture or model to help me understand?"



Helpful tools and resources

- Making the most of your appointment: myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=hw226888
- Working with your healthcare team: hqca.ca/for-patients-and-families/working-with-your-healthcare-team



Get your tests

You may also have tests and assessments to help find the cause of your symptoms and to rule out other health problems. These may include:

- **Internal pelvic exam**
 - This is done to check your pelvic organs.
 - You may feel pressure during the exam, but it shouldn't hurt.
 - You will get undressed from the waist down (underwear off).
 - You will get a sheet to cover yourself.
 - An instrument called a speculum is gently put in the vagina. The speculum makes it easier to see the vagina and cervix.
 - Your healthcare provider will feel with their hands for the shape and position of the reproductive organs.
 - Your healthcare provider will look for any obvious lesions (cuts, sores, polyps, or growths) and will examine the size and shape of the uterus.
 - Here is a helpful resource to support you in preparing for a pelvic exam: [Having Your First Pelvic Exam](#).
- **Pap test**
 - This test is done during the internal pelvic exam and looks for changes in the cells of the cervix. During the test, cells are gently removed from your cervix so they can be checked for any precancerous or cancerous changes.
- **Blood test(s)**
 - Certain blood tests may be ordered to understand your bleeding and your iron levels.
- **Pregnancy test**
 - This is done if there is a chance that you could be pregnant. This could be a blood or a urine test.
- **Urine test**
 - Your urine may be tested to see what the urine looks like and what might be in it.
- **Ultrasound**
 - A **pelvic ultrasound** uses an external probe on your lower abdomen to provide images of your pelvic structures.
 - A **transvaginal ultrasound** may be completed at the same time with your consent. In this ultrasound, a probe is inserted into the vagina to better look at the reproductive organs.



Review your test results

It is important to know what your test and assessment results are and what they mean. Take time to discuss your results with your healthcare provider. Medical terms can be hard to understand. And even common words like “positive” or “negative” might mean something different for medical tests. Ask your healthcare provider for explanations and examples to make sure you fully understand.

You might ask:

“What does this mean for me?”

“Is there a current concern? If so, what is it?”



Helpful tools and resources

You may find some of your results and health information using secure online tools:

MyHealth Records

See your lab results, immunizations, and some other results with a MyHealth Records account. Sign up at myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords.

MyAHS Connect

See your health information, manage your Alberta Health Services appointments, and interact directly with some members of your healthcare team. Ask your healthcare provider how to access your MyAHS Connect account. Learn more at ahs.ca/myahsconnect.



Review your treatment & management options

Every individual will require their own specific treatment and management plan. Your treatment choices may depend on your age, the cause of your bleeding, and if you plan to get pregnant in the future. Always follow the specific recommendations from your healthcare team.

Bleeding and pain management

- Your healthcare provider may recommend over-the-counter medicine to help reduce your bleeding and manage your pain, such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin).
- Depending on your pain level and your medical needs, your healthcare provider may also recommend other medications to help you manage your pain.

Hormone therapy

- This can include many different options and requires discussion with your healthcare team to determine what will be best for you. Sometimes hormones are delivered to the uterus with an intrauterine device (IUD) to decrease bleeding.

Hysteroscopy

- This procedure allows a surgeon to look inside of your uterus and help diagnose and treat abnormal uterine bleeding. A thin, lighted tube is inserted into your vagina to look at your cervix and inside of your uterus. This procedure can also help with treatment by removing polyps or fibroids.

Surgery

- Not everyone will need surgery. It may be done when other treatments don't work. It may include endometrial ablation (a procedure to remove the thin layer of tissue that lines the uterus) or hysterectomy (a procedure to remove your uterus).

Asking the following questions can help you make an informed decision about your different treatment options and decide which one(s) will work best for you:

"What are the advantages and disadvantages of each treatment option?"

"Can I use any of these treatment options together?"

"How will this treatment make me feel? Will it have other effects (side effects)?"

"What results can I expect?"



Helpful tools and resources

- For more information on these management and treatment options: gynqi.com/for-patients/
- Working with your healthcare team: & questions to ask about your treatment options: hqca.ca/for-patients-and-families/working-with-your-healthcare-team/



Talk with your healthcare provider about a referral

- Not all patients with abnormal uterine bleeding need a referral. Depending on your symptoms, your history, and test results, you may need a referral to a gynecologist.
- A gynecologist is a doctor who specializes in the vulva, vagina, uterus, and ovaries.
- You should hear about the progress of the referral to your gynecologist within 3 months.
- Your gynecologist will assess you and your condition and recommend what treatment is best for you and your needs.



Helpful tools and resources

To learn about how to prepare for your specialist appointment, visit ahs.ca/qure.



Start your treatment & watch your symptoms

As you try different treatment options, remember that if something doesn't work the way you thought it would, think about other options and connect with your healthcare provider to find what will work for you.

Remember to watch for and **call 811** if you are:

- Soaking a high-protection product (pad/tampon/menstrual cup) every hour for more than 2 hours
- Passing large clots (larger than a loonie), and/or
- Feeling dizzy, weak, feverish, or having severe abdominal pain

Watching your symptoms is important. Call your healthcare provider or Health Link at 811 if you have any concerns. You might feel like you don't want to bother your healthcare team, but no detail is too small to share. If it matters to you, it will matter to your healthcare team.

You can clarify with your healthcare team what to expect in terms of follow-up communication. Connect with your healthcare team whenever you:

- Have questions
- Notice your symptoms getting worse
- Have problems with your medicine
- Haven't gotten test results or heard back about an appointment in the time you had agreed to



Helpful tools and resources

If you can't reach your healthcare provider and need health advice or information, call Health Link anytime, day or night, by dialling **811**.



There are many different things that can impact your health and wellness. It is important to be able to work with your healthcare team to decide what is best for you, in your life, given your own unique circumstances as you manage your abnormal uterine bleeding.

Remember, you don't need to do everything all at once. Take realistic and manageable steps in your health and wellness. Consider why making a change may benefit you and the things that matter to you.



Helpful tools and resources

Find resources and services in your community:

211 helps Albertans find the right resource or service for whatever issue they need help with, at the right time. 211 is available anytime, day or night, by phone, text, and online chat. It is confidential and available in over 170 languages over the phone. To contact 211:

- Call 211
- Text INFO to 211
- Visit ab.211.ca

Workshops, classes, and services from the Alberta Healthy Living Program can help you to improve your health and quality of life with a chronic condition: ahs.ca/ahlp

Chronic Disease Management support: ahs.ca/cdm

Health Information & Tools: myhealth.alberta.ca/Pages/HealthInfoToolsDefault.aspx

Resources

There's lots of information out there, and it can be confusing to know what information is accurate and true. Here are some great resources that may be helpful for you.

- Gynecology Collaboration: gynqi.com/for-patients/
- Abnormal Uterine Bleeding (MyHealth Alberta): myhealth.alberta.ca/Health/Pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=aa76597

Get help now:

- Emergency: Call 911
- Health Link: Call 811

Mental health, addiction, and crisis support:

- [Addiction Helpline](https://www.addictionhelpline.ca/): 1-866-332-2322
- [Mental Health Helpline](https://www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca/): 1-877-303-2642
- Crisis Text Line: Text CONNECT to 741741
- Crisis Services Canada: 1-833-456-4566, or visit talksuicide.ca

Community and social supports:

- Alberta 211: 211, or visit ab.211.ca
- Family Violence Info Line: 310-1818, or visit alberta.ca/family-violence-find-supports.aspx
- Income Support: 1-866-644-5135, or visit alberta.ca/income-support.aspx

Alberta Health Services programs:

- Home Care: ahs.ca/homecare
- Find a Dietitian: ahs.ca/nutrition
- Spiritual Care Services: ahs.ca/spiritualcare

Primary care (family doctors):

- Find a doctor: ahs.ca/findadoctor
- Virtual care guide: ahs.ca/virtualhealth

Patient concerns and feedback:

- Office of Alberta Health Advocates: alberta.ca/office-of-alberta-health-advocates.aspx
- Alberta Health Services Patient Relations: 1-855-550-2555, or visit ahs.ca/patientfeedback

Helpful tip

If you can't print this resource at home, ask a family member, friend, or your healthcare provider to print it for you. You can also use a computer and printer at your local library.

Important phone numbers

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Notes

Use this space to take notes.

About this Pathway

The AHS Provincial Pathways Unit co- developed this patient pathway in partnership with patient and family advisors, primary and specialty care providers in Alberta. It is current as of **October 2023**.

Authors & Conflict of Interest Declaration

This pathway was reviewed and revised by a multi-disciplinary co-design team including gynecologists and primary care providers from across Alberta.

Pathway Review Process

Primary care pathways undergo scheduled review every two years, or earlier if there is a clinically significant change in knowledge or practice. The next scheduled review is **October 2025**. However, we welcome feedback at any time. Please email comments to AlbertaPathways@ahs.ca.

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Disclaimer

This pathway represents evidence-based best practice but does not override the individual responsibility of health care professionals to make decisions appropriate to their patients using their own clinical judgment given their patients' specific clinical conditions, in consultation with patients/alternate decision makers. The pathway is not a substitute for clinical judgment or advice of a qualified health care professional. It is expected that all users will seek advice of other appropriately qualified and regulated health care providers with any issues transcending their specific knowledge, scope of regulated practice or professional competence.