

The 7-2-1 Episode 1

Dr Gupta: Welcome to the first of our podcast series – *“7/2/1-All that you need to know about periods”*. I am Sweta Gupta, a pediatric hematologist at the Indiana Hemophilia and Thrombosis Center at Indianapolis and a proud member of the Foundation for Women and Girls with Blood Disorders. I have the pleasure of introducing my wonderful colleague, Dr Nefertiti Durant, an Associate Professor of Pediatrics, an Kate medicine physician at University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine. We both share a common passion, taking care of young girls with heavy menstrual bleeding.

Dr Durant: It’s an absolute pleasure, Dr Gupta!

Dr Gupta: Through this first podcast of our series, we want to help you differentiate normal vs. heavy menstrual bleeding and tell you more about how heavy menstrual bleeding could be a sign of an underlying bleeding disorder.

On that note, I would like to introduce Kimber, a woman with von Willebrand disease, a common bleeding disorder, who is followed at our center. Kimber is an advanced practice provider with us. Hello

Kimber!

Kimber: Hello Dr Gupta! Thank you for the introduction.

Dr Gupta: Her lovely daughter Kate is 14 and both mother and daughter are here with several questions about periods. Kate- go ahead!

Kate: Thank you Dr. Gupta! My first question is for Dr. Durant. I have noticed that my menstrual cycles are twice a month – aren't they supposed to be just once a month. Is that normal?

Dr. Durant: Well tell me more, Kate? What do you mean by twice a month?

Kate: They happen every three to four weeks.

Dr. Durant: That may be normal. How old are you and when was your first menstrual cycle?

Kate: 14. My first menstrual cycle started about 8 months ago

Dr. Durant: Menstrual cycles can be very irregular in

the first 2 years for teenage girls. In general, menstrual cycles occur every 21 days to every 35 days. For some teen girls, they may go as long as 6 weeks in between periods.

Kimber: But is it normal for them to be heavy?

Dr. Gupta: Well, what do you mean by heavy, Kate? How many days do you bleed for when you have a cycle?

Kate: I bleed for 8- 9 days.

Dr. Gupta: A normal length of a menses is 5-7 days or less. Do you pass blood clots- blood clots are dark red globs of blood ?

Kate: Yes I do

Dr. Durant: How large are the clots? Would you say they are smaller or larger than a quarter in size or roughly an inch?

Kate: Most of the time they are the size of a quarter or larger and I have noticed them every time I change my pad.

Dr. Gupta: How often do you change your pads in the day? every 2 hours, 4 or 6 hours?

Kate: More recently, I change them every 2 hours and I did have to wake up in the middle of the night to change once.

Dr Durant: Do you use thin, regular, maxi or overnight pads ?

Kimber: Since I am the one buying them Dr Durant, I know they are maxi pads.

Dr. Gupta: Do you ever stain your clothes or bedsheets?

Kimber: Kate has soaked through her pads before at school. I have had to bring her clothes to school to change into. We have talked with her pediatrician about her cycles. Is this normal for a young girl her age?

Dr. Gupta: It does sound like Kate's cycles are heavy. Cycles lasting for more than **7 days**, changing your pad/tampon **every 2 hrs or less**, passing blood clots more than **one inch or a quarter in size**, are all signs

of a heavy period – “7/2/1”. Kimber were your menstrual cycles heavy when you were young?

Kimber: Yes they were. I started pills for my heavy cycles when I was in college. My sister and mother also had very heavy cycles. In fact, my mother had a hysterectomy at 40. My grandmother had some kind of bleeding problem. We don't know what it was but I am sure it was von Willebrand disease now that I know I have it. Would you recommend we do some further evaluation for Kate's heavy flow?

Dr. Durant: There are a number of young girls who have irregular cycles for the first 2 years. However, your daughter's menstrual cycles meet criteria concerning for heavy menstrual bleeding which could possibly be due to an underlying bleeding disorder. Also we know that even if you do not meet the 7/2/1 criteria, excessive blood loss during your periods that interferes with your physical, emotional, social, and material quality of life, is also considered as heavy menstrual bleeding. Not to throw numbers at you but - Bleeding disorders affect 1-2% of the general population, but are found in approximately 20% of Kate girls who are evaluated for heavy menstrual bleeding and in 33% of Kate girls hospitalized for

heavy menstrual bleeding.

Dr. Gupta: I agree with Dr Durant. Kimber, your family and personal history does raise the possibility of a bleeding disorder for Kate. Since the bleeding disorder most frequently associated with heavy menstrual bleeding in young women is Von Willebrand's Disease, I would like to ask Kimber some questions related to bleeding symptoms. Do you have a history of nose bleeds?

Kate: Yes, about twice a month lasting for 15-20 minutes, which are tough to control. Let me also add -- just like my mother, I bruise easily and bleed through a couple of band aids when I get a shaving cut.

Dr Gupta: Hmmmm...those symptoms do raise a red flag for a bleeding disorder. Kimber, has there been excessive bleeding with surgeries or dental procedures for Kate?

Kimber: She has never had a surgery. But yes, she did ooze for 10 minutes when she had her baby teeth pulled once. Do you think she has VWD?

Dr Gupta : Yes, it is very likely since VWD can affect

individuals in the same family. We will need to do some blood tests for Kate and go from there.

Dr Durant : I agree with Dr Gupta. We would also recommend checking hemoglobin and iron levels to make sure she does not have iron deficiency which can be the result of heavy periods. Let's also have Kate download an app to help accurately measure the bleeding with her periods so that we can clearly understand how severe her bleeding is. We call this a PBAC score. We can then talk about how best we can help manage her period related bleeding.

Kate: Oh I already track my periods on an app! It tells me when I am going to have my next period!

Dr. Durant: Does the app collect any information on how many pads or how often you are changing?

Kate: No but it tells me when I am going to get my next period.

Dr. Durant: From your description, it looks like you are bleeding more than you should during your period. But, there are apps where you can enter information on how often you are changing, what type of pads you use

and how soaked the pad is every time you change. When you enter this information, you get a point score, which we call a pictorial blood assessment chart (PBAC) and helps the doctor understand how much bleeding you are having with each period. This information collected before and after a treatment to control the bleeding can also help us really understand if the treatment is working for you. One such app is called “Sisterhood” but there are other apps which can do the same. We can also collect this information in paper form which you can bring with you when you come back to follow up.

Kate: I did not know that. I would like to do this on my phone please.

Dr. Durant: Great! We will help you get the app and will take a look at it when you come back to see us.

Dr Gupta: Very good questions ladies!! I hope we answered all! It was a pleasure meeting you both today.

Kimber : Thank you Dr Durant and Dr Gupta! We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Dr Durant : Thank you for tuning in. In our next podcast of the series “ 7/2/1-All that you need to know about periods” we will talk about Demystifying IUDs.

Dr.: It sounds like your periods are pretty heavy. Do they interfere with your activities? For example, do you ever have to leave your classroom in the middle of a teaching session to deal with your period? Or have to skip a sports practice or even miss school?

Kate: I’m pretty good now at changing my pads on time but it does take a lot of work to make sure my bag is repacked every night. Sometimes I do have to call my mom to bring me some extra things. I end up missing school for my period every few months.

Dr: We can offer you medications to decrease your period bleeding. You don’t have to qualify for anything to take these medications, which are safe and effective.

Kate: I’m not sure if I want to take a medication. I’m

not good with swallowing pills.

Kimber: I'm not sure I want yyy to take those pills – she's so young! Won't they disrupt her development? Can we just see if there is a problem with anemia first and think about it?

Dr: There are both hormonal and non-hormonal medications that help control the amount of period bleeding. Success ranges between 60% decreased amount to up to 95% decreased amount of bleeding with hormonal medications. Hormonal medications sound strange for a 14 year old, but they do not change development or long-term fertility and there is a lot of reassuring safety data. There are significant benefits in being about to focus on school and activities and not needing to worry about bleeding so much! Hormonal medications come in many forms and have a variety of side effects and benefits, depending on the version. Not all of them are oral pills. Non-hormonal medications decrease bleeding by about 40% and only need to be taken during the period, though there are several pills per day and they are quite large. We can talk more about the different options if you decide you want treatment. Let's see what your lab tests show!