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## ME AND MY OPERATION: Magic wand that banishes the misery of heavy periods in 60 seconds

By SOPHIE GOODCHILD FOR THE DAILY MAIL

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Excessively heavy and painful periods affect around one in 20 women.

Now a new treatment can banish the pain and discomfort for good.

Julie Turner, 47, an administrator from Stanford-le-Hope, Essex, underwent the 60-second procedure in March, as she tells SOPHIE GOODCHILD.

### THE PATIENT

My periods were heavy from the day they first began when I was ten years old.

They were so intense for at least two days a month that I'd have to miss school, take painkillers and go straight to bed.

At 14, I went to the GP with my mother. But all he could do was put me on the contraceptive pill Microgynon to regulate my periods.

I took that up to about the age of 40, apart from when I had my four children, who are now aged from nine to 23.

The Pill made my periods lighter and cut the pain considerably. And between pregnancies I wasn't off it long enough to have any trouble.

But in 2005 I gave birth to my youngest child and a few months later my husband Graham, who was 40 at the time, had a vasectomy. So by 2006, when I was 39, I came off the Pill.

My periods were manageable at first, but got worse through my 40s. The bleeding was far worse than during my teens. For two days a month I only moved when necessary and didn't go out unless there was a loo nearby.

It was embarrassing. After eight years of putting up with it I finally saw a GP in June last year after prompting from a colleague.

The doctor put me back on Microgynon and told me to take it continuously (people normally stop it for seven days each month). But it didn't stop me bleeding.

I went for an internal scan of my womb at the local health centre to check for gynaecological issues. This revealed I had three fibroids - benign growths in the womb - but I was told they were too small to be the cause of the problem.

My GP suggested fitting a Mirena coil in my womb. This releases the hormone progesterone, which he said would control my heavy bleeding by balancing out my levels of oestrogen, which can thicken the womb. Another option would be to remove my womb entirely in a hysterectomy.



Julie Turner, 47, from Essex, underwent the procedure for heavy periods

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But first I was referred to Yatin Thakur, a consultant obstetrician at Basildon Hospital. He told me about a new treatment called Minitouch - a device inserted into your womb that burns away the womb lining using microwaves.

He said it should make my periods stop entirely, along with the pain. It would be painful for a minute, but the results would be instant. And, unlike a hysterectomy, it's not major surgery.

So, I had the treatment in March. They sat me in a chair, like a dentist's with my legs in foot rests, and gave me gas and air.

When they inserted the device the pain was like the worst type of contraction but it lasted only a minute. It stopped as soon as they removed the Minitouch and I drove home ten minutes later.

I had a dull ache for a bit, but was fine the next day. I have not bled a day since the procedure. It has transformed my life.

### THE SPECIALIST

**Yatin Thakur is a consultant obstetrician at Basildon and Thurrock University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.**

About one in 20 women have excessively heavy periods, losing 80ml or more of blood. As well as pain and embarrassment, it can cause anaemia and lead to fatigue.

In the first half of the menstrual cycle women get a hormone surge that thickens the womb lining in anticipation of a possible pregnancy. During the second half, this lining is then shed if the egg that is released is not fertilised.

We don't know exactly why some women suffer heavy periods. One cause can be fibroids - benign growths that stretch the womb lining, increasing the tissue lost in the form of clots and blood.

Among over-40s the most common factor is when hormones become imbalanced before the menopause. This can cause the womb to thicken, so bleeding is heavier. The excessive pain some women experience is caused by muscles going into overdrive to expel this thick lining. Until recently, one main treatment was the Pill, which helps regulate your menstrual cycle. But this can cause side-effects and increase the risk of blood clots.

The Mirena coil is a contraceptive device that releases hormones and regulates periods. But it can take several months to cut blood flow and is only up to 60 per cent effective treating heavy periods.

Doctors can also prescribe tranexamic acid tablets, which help the blood in your womb clot, as well as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), which reduce pain. But they are not always effective and can cause nausea and stomach upsets.

A last resort is a hysterectomy, where the womb is removed. This is major surgery with an infection risk and a six-week recovery time.

A newer approach is to remove the womb lining. Doctors have used a hot wire which cuts away tissue like a knife, but there is a small risk of puncturing the womb.

Now there are devices that burn, rather than cut, this lining away.

One of the most widely used, NovaSure, uses radio frequencies. The downside is that it is relatively large (around 7.2mm wide), so the doctor has to insert rods to stretch the neck of the womb. This is uncomfortable and requires local anaesthetic inside the womb.

Minitouch is still new in the UK, but some hospitals have introduced it. A clinical study published in the Journal of Minimal Invasive Gynaecology has shown an 80 to 90 per cent success rate compared with NovaSure, which is 70 to 80 per cent effective.

We ask the patient to take painkillers before the procedure and offer gas and air. Before we start, we do a biopsy, collecting cells from the womb, to check for cancer - the Minitouch burns away the lining and removes any cells that could be tested.

Then we check the position of the cervix (the neck of the womb) and insert a gauge to measure the exact length of the uterus so we know how far to insert the Minitouch - if it's not in far enough, it won't burn away all the lining.

Next, we insert the Minitouch itself. It resembles a straw, 3.5mm wide (less than half the diameter of a Novasure) and 24cm long. The device is inserted via the vagina into the uterine cavity. We open up the end of the 'straw' to reveal the wire, shaped like a heart to conform to the shape of the womb.

Then we connect it to a microwave generator that looks like a laptop. The machine will not emit a current if the wire is in the wrong position.

We use microwaves because they heat one molecule after another so an even layer of tissue is burned.

The heart-shaped wire heats to 75c and is held against the womb lining for 60-90 seconds. The aim is to burn the layer of tissue 5 to 10mm deep up to the muscle. Signals let us know when we have achieved this.

It also burns away any fibroids in the womb.

The procedure allows scar tissue to form so the lining will not grow back. Depending on their pain threshold, women can feel pain equivalent to either an intense period or labour pain.

Once the microwaving is done the patient can usually go home after ten minutes. Up to 20 per cent of people may need a repeat procedure if they still bleed heavily. This could be because they have a large womb, or their womb muscle as thickened, making it harder to burn away the lining.



The Minitouch device was inserted into her womb to burn away the lining using microwaves

*"I have not bled a day since the procedure. It has transformed my life"*

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And it is only suitable for women who have completed their families. Burning the womb means they are unlikely to get pregnant because the egg cannot implant in it, but we cannot guarantee this.

We see around 650 women a year with heavy bleeding at this hospital. We aim to treat most of them in future with this new approach.

**ANY DRAWBACKS?**

'Techniques to burn the womb lining are well recognised now for women with heavy periods,' says Naweed Shahid, consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Foundation Trust.

'But there's no data yet available for this procedure beyond two years. So we don't know how it works long-term and how many patients will need further treatment.'

**The surgery costs the NHS £415.**



About one in 20 women have excessively heavy periods, which can cause anaemia and fatigue

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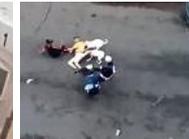
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**oldun1**, herennow, United Kingdom, 2 weeks ago  
I had something similar done in the 80s when I was in my 40s at the Royal Free Hospital called 'ablation'. However, now I am 71 it has left me with a thickened inside womb but it doesn't cause me any trouble. The heavy periods were hell. I went on a cruise once and I think I bled on every chair in the dining room. I could have had a hysterectomy in my 40s. for fibroids but I chose ablation instead which I had to pay for. However, I can't think why I was foolish enough not to have the hysterectomy when it was offered. As that consultant said 'you'll never suffer from fear of cancer of the womb, cervix or ovaries'.

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**Sarah**, Truro, United Kingdom, 2 weeks ago  
I had this done a couple of years ago, amazing results and wish I could have had it done a lot

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