



Uterine Fibroids

Uterine fibroids are benign (not cancer) growths in the uterus. They are the most common type of growth found in a woman's pelvis. They occur in about 20 percent to 25 percent of all women. Many women who have fibroids are not aware of them because the growths can remain small and not cause symptoms. Fibroids can cause problems because of their size, number and location. Like any growth, fibroids should be checked by a doctor.

Types of Fibroids

Uterine fibroids are growths that develop from the cells that make up the muscle of the uterus. They are also called leiomyomas or myomas.

Fibroids can range in size from small, pea-sized growths to large, round ones that may be more than 5 to 6 inches wide.

A woman may have only one fibroid or many of varying sizes.

Causes

Fibroids are most common in women aged 30 to 40, but they can occur at any age. Fibroids occur more often in black women than in white women.

Although fibroids are quite common, little is known about what causes them.

Symptoms

Most fibroids, even large ones, produce no symptoms at all. When symptoms occur, they often include:

- Changes in menstruation
- Pain
- Pressure
- Miscarriages and infertility

Diagnosis

During a routine pelvic exam, the first signs of fibroids can be found. There are a number of tests that may show more information about fibroids:

- Ultrasound
- Hysteroscopy
- Hysterosalpingography (HSG)
- Laparoscopy

Complications

Although most fibroids do not cause problems, there can be complications. Fibroids that are attached to the uterus by a stem may twist. This can cause pain, nausea or fever. Fibroids may become infected.

A very large fibroid may cause swelling of the abdomen.

Fibroids also may cause infertility.



Treatment

Fibroids that do not cause symptoms, are small, or occur in a woman nearing menopause often do not require treatment. Certain signs and symptoms, though, may signal the need for treatment:

- Heavy or painful menstrual periods
- Bleeding between periods
- Uncertainty whether the growth is a fibroid or another type of tumor, such as an ovarian tumor
- Rapid increase in growth of the fibroid
- Infertility
- Pelvic pain

Fibroids may be treated by removing them with surgery.

The fibroids may be removed with myomectomy or hysterectomy.

Myomectomy

Myomectomy is the surgical removal of fibroids, leaving the uterus in place.

Hysterectomy

Hysterectomy is the removal of the uterus. The ovaries may or may not be removed. It depends on other factors.

Uterine Fibroids and Pregnancy

A small number of pregnant women have uterine fibroids. If you are pregnant and have fibroids, they likely won't cause problems for you or your baby.

Finally ...

Uterine fibroids are benign growths that occur quite often in women. About one in four or five women over age 35 has them. Fibroids may cause no symptoms and require no treatment.

(Adapted from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists handout)