

# About Uterine Fibroids



Uterine fibroids, also called myomas and leiomyomas, are noncancerous growths that form on the wall of the uterus, or less commonly, in the cervix. Typically occurring in women of reproductive age, many women develop fibroids but are unaware of them because they often cause no symptoms and seldom require treatment. In other cases, fibroids can cause noticeable symptoms and should be diagnosed and treated by a qualified gynecologist.

## Symptoms of Uterine Fibroids

Many women with uterine fibroids do not experience any symptoms. Symptoms are related to the size and location of the fibroids. Some women may experience the following symptoms:

- **Heavy and prolonged menstrual bleeding (abnormal uterine bleeding)** – the most common symptom and the main reason treatment may be required
- **Pelvic pain** – especially during intercourse or during menstrual periods
- **Frequent urination, constipation or painful bowel movements (pressure symptoms)** – the fibroids may put pressure on other organs resulting in changes to urination or bowel habits
- **Infertility** – although fibroids are not often the cause of infertility, in some cases they can cause problems with becoming pregnant

## Diagnosis of Uterine Fibroids

Along with pelvic exams and ultrasounds, uterine fibroids can be confirmed with hysteroscopy, in which a thin device is inserted through the vagina and the opening of the cervix to provide doctors a view inside the uterus.

## Treatment Options for Uterine Fibroids

Uterine fibroids usually do not require treatment. While some fibroids may cause no noticeable symptoms, women should consult a qualified gynecologist. Your doctor may periodically evaluate your fibroids to determine if there is any change in size or if you are experiencing new symptoms related to your fibroids.

Many treatment options exist for uterine fibroids. When uncomfortable symptoms do occur, options may include prescription medications. In some cases surgery, such as myomectomy, may be necessary to remove fibroids to reduce or eliminate symptoms.

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### Myomectomy

Myomectomy is a surgery to remove uterine fibroids. Unlike hysterectomy, which removes your entire uterus, myomectomy removes only the fibroids and leaves your uterus intact. This difference is significant in order to preserve or improve a patient's ability to bear children.

Myomectomy may be performed several different ways, including the following:

- **Abdominal myomectomy** – completed through either a vertical or horizontal incision in the lower belly area where the fibroids are removed.
- **Laparoscopic myomectomy** – A minimally invasive procedure using a laparoscope, an instrument with a thin, lighted tube and small camera, which is inserted through several small incisions in the abdomen. The laparoscope allows your doctor to see your pelvic organs and remove the fibroids.
- **Hysteroscopic myomectomy** – A minimally invasive procedure completed through the cervix and vagina. It is performed with the aid of a hysteroscope, an instrument with a thin, lighted tube and small camera that allows your doctor to see your pelvic organs and remove the fibroids.

### Uterine Artery Embolization

Uterine artery embolization is a procedure performed by a radiologist. Small particles are injected into the blood vessels of the fibroids in order to clog them. This cuts off the blood supply to the fibroid and can cause it to shrink and potentially reduce symptoms caused by the fibroid.

### Hysterectomy

A hysterectomy, or complete removal of the uterus and/or cervix, may be performed for symptomatic fibroids, especially when the desire for future pregnancy is not a concern.

A hysterectomy can be performed several ways:

- **Abdominal hysterectomy** – completed through an incision in the lower belly area where the uterus and/or cervix is removed.
- **Vaginal hysterectomy** – completed through an incision in the vagina where the uterus and/or cervix is removed.
- **Laparoscopic hysterectomy** – minimally invasive surgery performed with the aid of a laparoscope, an instrument with a thin, lighted tube and small camera that allows your doctor to see your pelvic organs and remove the uterus and/or cervix.
- **Robotic hysterectomy** – minimally invasive surgery performed with the aid of robotic arms and 3D technology for increased precision.