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# Health & Wellness

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## Uterine fibroid embolization

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Uterine fibroid embolization or uterine artery embolization offers patients a minimally invasive treatment for uterine fibroids. Fibroids are benign growths that generally occur in women who are in their 30s and 40s. Fibroids are the most common non-cancerous tumor for that age group.

Fibroids grow in and around the uterus. They can range in size from about the size of a pea to growths about five to six inches wide. You can have one fibroid or many of different sizes. While fibroids may not cause symptoms, some women experience:

- A feeling of fullness in the lower abdomen
- Heavy, painful periods
- Bleeding between periods
- Painful sex
- Difficult or painful urination
- Lower back pain

Fibroids can be treated with medications, which often can cause unpleasant side effects, or with surgery. Uterine fibroid embolization (UFE) offers a minimally invasive, non-surgical treatment for fibroids that aims to stop the blood flow to the fibroids, thereby causing them to shrink or go away completely. If you undergo UFE, you will be sedated but will not be completely asleep. First, an interventional radiologist will make a small incision in your groin area and then feed a catheter into the artery in the upper thigh. A contrast dye is injected so that the radiologist can see the artery and the uterus on an X-ray. The radiologist injects particles that block the blood supply to the fibroids, causing them to shrink.

In most cases, uterine fibroid embolization



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can be done as an outpatient procedure. The procedure generally takes between one and three hours. After the procedure, a bandage will be applied to your groin area where the incision was made, and your doctor may put you on bedrest for up to six hours. You may have fever, extreme fatigue, pain, nausea and vomiting after UFE. Some women are able to control their pain with an over-the-counter medication such as ibuprofen, but your doctor may prescribe a more powerful drug for pain relief. You may experience vaginal bleeding after UFE, due to fibroids breaking down. Some women also pass

fibroids through their vagina. If this happens to you, call your doctor right away to ensure you do not develop an infection or bleeding problems.

While complications are rare, they can include infection and injury to the uterus.

About 95 percent of women report less bleeding after UFE. Five years after the procedure more than 70 percent of women still report symptom control. In about one-fifth of cases, fibroids grow back after a few years, and UFE may need to be repeated.

Most women restart their menstrual periods after a few months, but a few will enter menopause (generally women ages 45 or older).

If you want to have children, you should talk to your doctor before undergoing a UFE. While many women have had successful pregnancies after UFE, it may be more difficult to become pregnant and there is an increased risk of pregnancy complications. In addition, in some cases, women who have had complications from UFE may have to undergo a hysterectomy.

To learn more about uterine fibroid embolization or for a free referral to a physician who performs UFEs, please call us at 1-800-984-3434.