

UTERINE FIBROIDS: THERE ARE OPTIONS!!

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Have you wondered why your menstrual cycle seems to be heavier and more uncomfortable now than when you were 20, 30 or 40 years old? The answer may be uterine fibroids which are non-cancerous tumors located in the smooth muscle of the uterus. Fibroids occur in 20-50% of women and are more common in women of African-American or Latin descent.

Fibroids (also called leiomyomas) are the most common solid pelvic tumors in women. The cause is unknown, but the risk is higher in women who are overweight or who eat diets high in fatty foods. Many women have fibroids yet do not have any symptoms. For women who are experiencing symptoms, the most common are abnormal uterine bleeding, pelvic pressure, and urinary frequency or incontinence. Abnormal uterine bleeding occurs because of the uterus' inability to contract down due to the location of the fibroid. Pelvic pressure may occur if the fibroids are large or located on top of the uterus. Urinary frequency, urinary incontinence, or constipation occur when fibroids are located near the bladder or bowel.

Women with fibroids are able to conceive and carry a healthy pregnancy to full term. However, they have a higher risk of miscarriage, infertility, preterm labor, pain, bleeding and other labor complications. Therefore, if you have fibroids and desire to become pregnant, consider consulting your gynecologist first. She/He will obtain a thorough medical history, full gynecological examination, diagnostic tests and pelvic ultrasounds and then discuss what options are right for you.

Generally, fibroids only need to be treated if the symptoms you are experiencing are disrupting your lifestyle. There are many surgical treatments for uterine fibroids. Abdominal Myomectomy is a surgical procedure where the fibroids are removed while leaving the uterus intact. Although there is a 10% risk of recurrence, many women find the immediate improvement of their symptoms well worth the postoperative recuperation period, time missed from work, and discomfort experienced while healing. Other surgical options include 1.) Hysterectomy-removal of the fibroids, ovaries and uterus, 2.) Endometrial Ablation-insertion of a balloon-like instrument into

the uterus which is heated to destroy the lining of the uterus causing a decrease in menstrual bleeding. 3.) Uterine Artery Embolization-Radiology performed procedure which cuts off the blood supply to the fibroids causing them to shrink. All of these options treat the fibroids and the associated symptoms by removing them or shrinking them.

There are several non-surgical treatment options however they do not treat the fibroids themselves but instead reduce the symptoms associated with them. Such options are: 1.) Birth control pills, Ortho-Evra Patch or Nuvaring, 2.) Hormone-Secreting Intrauterine Device (IUD), and 3.) Injectable medications like Depo-Provera or Depo-Lupron. These hormonal treatments all reduce excessive bleeding without surgical intervention and possible complications.

Lastly, if you are considering trying non-traditional medicine, acupuncture may be the right treatment for you. Studies show that bi-weekly acupuncture treatments over a 3-month period slow the growth of fibroids and decrease abdominal pain. If you are interested in considering acupuncture be sure to confirm that the acupuncturist that you select has experience in the treatment of fibroids.

Thankfully, there are always new treatment options under investigation. If you suspect that you may have fibroids or just want to have a thorough examination before you try to become pregnant, call your gynecologist and make an appointment today!

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