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## UTERINE FIBROIDS

### What are fibroids?

Fibroids, also called myomas or leiomyomata, are non-cancerous tumor growths of the muscles and tissue of the uterus. Fibroids may occur as a single growth or in clusters. Their size can also vary from the size of a seed to the size of a grapefruit or larger. They can be located on the inner (submucosal) or outer (serosal) surface of the uterus as well as within (intramural) the uterine wall.

### Who gets fibroids?

Approximately 25-50% of women get fibroids, most commonly over the age of 35. African American women are more likely to get fibroids and at a younger age. Being overweight may also increase the chance of fibroids.

### What are the symptoms?

Most fibroids produce no symptoms. However, when symptoms do occur they may cause:

- ❖ Changes in menstruation: Heavy bleeding, bleeding between periods, longer periods
- ❖ Pelvic pressure: May cause frequent urinating, difficult bowel movements
- ❖ Pain: Low abdominal or lower back pain, painful intercourse
- ❖ Infertility: Difficulty getting pregnant, may increase risk for miscarriage or preterm labor
- ❖ Enlarged uterus or abdomen

### How are fibroids diagnosed?

- ❖ Ultrasound: Sound waves create a picture of the pelvic organs.
- ❖ Hysteroscopy: A slender camera is inserted through the cervix and the lining of the uterus can be visualized.
- ❖ Laparoscopy: Small incisions are made in the abdomen and a camera may see fibroids on the outer uterus.
- ❖ MRI and CT Scans: Imaging tests that can sometimes see pelvic organs, but usually an ultrasound is adequate.

### What are the treatment options? (No treatment is necessary if the fibroids do not cause any symptoms)

- ❖ Medications: Sometimes hormonal treatments such as birth control may control symptoms. In addition, drugs such as gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH) agonists may be used before surgery to shrink fibroids.
- ❖ Myomectomy: Surgical removal of the fibroids while keeping the uterus in place. This is an option that maintains a woman's ability to bear children after surgery. Depending on the size and location a myomectomy may be performed by:
  - Laparotomy: Surgery through an open incision on the abdomen.
  - Laparoscopy: (see above description)
  - Robot-assisted: Similar to laparoscopy, but with enhanced surgical precision.
  - Hysteroscopy: (see above description)
- ❖ Hysterectomy: The uterus is removed along with the fibroids. This may be done with laparotomy, laparoscopy, robotic surgery, or through the vagina.
- ❖ Myolysis: The fibroid tissue is destroyed with coagulation, usually during a laparoscopy
- ❖ Uterine Artery Embolization: A procedure performed by a radiologist that blocks the blood flow that permits the fibroids to grow.
- ❖ Vessel ligation: Blocking the blood flow to the fibroids by laparoscopy.