

Frequently Asked Questions

What are fibroids?

Fibroids are growths that form in the muscle of the **uterus**. They are almost always benign (not cancer). Fibroids can cause:

- Changes in **menstrual periods**, especially heavy bleeding and bleeding that lasts more than 7 days
- Pain in the abdomen or lower back
- Pain during sex
- Pressure in the lower abdomen, causing problems with urination and bowel movements
- An enlarged uterus and abdomen
- Problems with fertility and pregnancy

Fibroids also may cause no symptoms at all. See [Uterine Fibroids](#) for more information.

What is uterine artery embolization (UAE)?

Uterine artery embolization (UAE) is a procedure in which tiny particles (about the size of grains of sand) are injected into the blood vessels that lead to the uterus. The particles cut off the blood flow to the fibroid and cause it to shrink. UAE can be used instead of **hysterectomy** or **myomectomy** to treat fibroids.

Why is UAE done?

UAE can help women whose fibroids cause symptoms and who want to keep their uterus. They may have tried medication first, but not felt relief. UAE also is sometimes used to treat women who are bleeding very heavily after giving birth.

How is UAE done?

UAE usually is done in the following way:

1. A very small incision (cut) is made in the top of your leg, where your leg meets your [pelvis](#). A [catheter](#) is inserted into an artery in your leg.
2. The catheter is passed into the uterine arteries, which supply blood to the uterus.
3. Small plastic or gelatin particles are put into the arteries through the catheter. The particles block the blood supply to the fibroids.

A doctor called an interventional radiologist usually performs UAE. It can be done as an outpatient procedure in most cases. A [sedative](#) and [local anesthesia](#) are given.

How effective is UAE?

Studies show that UAE is effective for many women, but some women will need follow-up treatment. One study showed that:

- About 3 in 4 women who had UAE got relief from fibroid symptoms
- About 1 in 5 women who had UAE later needed another surgery for their fibroids (including a second UAE, myomectomy, or hysterectomy)

What are the benefits of UAE?

UAE may reduce pain, pressure, and bleeding from fibroids. It is less painful than a hysterectomy. UAE can treat many fibroids at the same time, and it is not affected by abdominal scar tissue from prior surgery. Compared to a hysterectomy or myomectomy, a UAE typically:

- Involves a shorter hospital stay
- Allows you to go back to work and other activities sooner

- Has lower rates of blood transfusion

What are the risks of UAE?

Risks of UAE include:

- Bleeding, infection, or bruising
- Injury to an artery or to the uterus
- Problems with a future pregnancy
- Problems with the ovaries or premature [menopause](#) , especially if you are age 45 or older
- Delayed diagnosis of a rare cancer that was mistaken for a fibroid

How should I prepare for UAE?

You and your radiologist or [obstetrician–gynecologist \(ob-gyn\)](#) will discuss how you can prepare for the procedure. You may not be able to eat or drink anything for several hours beforehand. Before scheduling the procedure, tell your radiologist or ob-gyn:

- If you are pregnant or want to get pregnant
- If you smoke
- What medications you are taking

What should I expect after UAE?

Some women who have UAE go home the same day. Others stay in the hospital overnight. Right after the procedure, you may have to lie flat for a few hours. You should be offered pain medication.

You may have abdominal pain and cramps for up to 2 weeks after UAE. You also may pass fibroid tissue through your [vagina](#) .

It may take 2 to 3 months before you see a change in your fibroid symptoms. Your fibroids may continue to shrink for a year or more after UAE.

When should I call my doctor after UAE?

Pelvic pain is normal after UAE. So is a low fever. A heating pad or warm compress may help the pain. Call your ob-gyn if you have:

- Pain so severe that medication does not help
- A fever higher than 101° F
- Nausea or vomiting
- Bleeding or pain where the catheter was inserted
- A change in color or temperature of either of your legs

Glossary

Catheter: A tube used to drain fluid from or give fluid to the body.

Fibroids: Growths that form in the muscle of the uterus. Fibroids usually are noncancerous.

Hysterectomy: Surgery to remove the uterus.

Local Anesthesia: The drugs that stop pain in a part of the body.

Menopause: The time when a woman's menstrual periods stop permanently. Menopause is confirmed after 1 year of no periods.

Menstrual Period: The monthly shedding of blood and tissue from the uterus.

Myomectomy: Surgery to uterine fibroids only, leaving the uterus in place.

Obstetrician–Gynecologist (Ob-Gyn): A doctor with special training and education in women's health.

Pelvis: The lower portion of the trunk of the body.

Sedative: An agent or drug that eases nervousness or tension.

Uterine Artery Embolization: A procedure to block the blood vessels to the uterus. This procedure is used to stop bleeding after delivery. It is also used to stop other causes of bleeding from the uterus.

Uterus: A muscular organ in the female pelvis. During pregnancy, this organ holds and nourishes the fetus.

Vagina: A tube-like structure surrounded by muscles. The vagina leads from the uterus to the outside of the body.

If you have further questions, contact your ob-gyn.

Don't have an ob-gyn? [Learn how to find a doctor near you.](#)

FAQ522

Published: October 2020

Last reviewed: October 2020

Copyright 2024 by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. All rights reserved. Read [copyright and permissions information](#).

This information is designed as an educational aid for the public. It offers current information and opinions related to women's health. It is not intended as a statement of the standard of care. It does not explain all of the proper treatments or methods of care. It is not a substitute for the advice of a physician. Read [ACOG's complete disclaimer](#).

[About ACOG](#)

[Disclaimer](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[How to Find an Ob-Gyn](#)



Copyright 2024 American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

[Privacy Statement](#)

|

[Terms and Conditions of Use](#)