

Signs of fibroids and various treatment options

Usually benign, these growths can be treated depending on the type of symptoms they cause, says ob-gyn Geraldine Tan



Fibroids that cause pain can be removed by surgical methods.
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Fibroids are growths that occur within the muscle wall or from the outer surface of the uterus. They tend to develop during one's reproductive years and are usually non-cancerous.

The exact cause of fibroids is unknown, although it is thought that genetics and excess oestrogen may cause their formation. Obstetrician and gynaecologist Geraldine Tan explains more about the condition.

Q How do you know if you have fibroids and what are the symptoms?

Fibroids can be asymptomatic but may cause symptoms depending on their size and location. You may not know if you have fibroids unless you go for a pelvic ultrasound scan.

Those within the muscle wall near the uterine cavity can cause heavy and occasionally painful periods. Large fibroids in the back of the womb may cause pressure symptoms like lower backache, constipation and/or pain during intercourse. Large ones in the front of the uterus may put pressure on the bladder, resulting in more frequent urination.

Fibroids that grow upwards from the top of the uterus, if big, may present as a bulge in the lower abdomen.

Q How do you manage fibroids that cause heavy period flow?

There are non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs which reduce the production of prostaglandin, which is linked to heavy periods. Another is tranexamic acid which works to stop the bleeding from small blood vessels in the womb lining.

Other non-oral methods include: 1) Mirena, a small T-shaped device placed in the uterus that releases levonorgestrel, a hormone that thins out the uterine lining and reduces bleeding, and 2) progesterone injections, which thin the uterine lining.

If medical treatment does not work, consider endometrial ablation, which involves heating the uterine lining to reduce bleeding. Another is hysteroscopic resection, which involves inserting an instrument into the womb to remove fibroids located within the uterine cavity.

Q What are the options to relieve pressure from large fibroids?

The mainstay of treatment is surgery. Medical treatment is only temporary.

An injectable hormone known as gonadotropin releasing hormone analogue stops the ovaries releasing oestrogen and causes fibroids to shrink. However, the injections induce a state of menopause and are usually used pre-surgery to shrink the fibroids so that a smaller surgical incision can be made.

Myomectomy, a procedure to remove fibroids, can be done by keyhole surgery for smaller fibroids or open surgery, usually for larger and multiple fibroids. This method preserves the uterus and is advised for younger women who still want to have children. The downside is that fibroids may recur.

For women who do not want more children, they can opt for hysterectomy or the removal of the whole uterus.

A non-surgical method called uterine arterial embolisation is an option for those who do not want to conceive. This involves passing a catheter into the artery that supplies blood into the womb to block it off and prevent further growth of fibroids.



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