



What are Fibroids? - March 2009

Inside this months issue

What are fibroids?

What are the symptoms?

Some additional symptoms

What Causes Uterine Fibroids?

What are your choices?

Supplements

Tests

What are fibroids?

Fibroids are non-cancerous growths in or on the muscular wall of the womb (the myometrium). They can vary in number and size; some fibroids can be as small as a pea, the size of a grapefruit or as large as a seven or eight-month-old foetus. Fibroids are very common and can affect 20 percent of women over the age of 30. Rare in women under the age of 20 and they seem to run in families, but we are not sure at present whether this is a genuinely genetic predisposition, or whether lifestyle and diet play a role in some families.

Fibroids are given different names depending on where and how they grow:

- Submucosal fibroids grow on the inside of the womb and extend into the uterine cavity.
- Intramural fibroids grow within the uterine wall (the wall of the womb).
- Subserol fibroids grow on the outside of the womb, on the lining between the uterus and the pelvic cavity.
- Penduculated fibroids can be attached either to the inside or outside wall of the womb, and they are characterised by a stalk

What are the symptoms?

Abnormal Menstruation and bleeding

The main symptom of fibroids is heavy periods and heavy bleeding which is the result of the fibroids making the womb bigger; often leading to large clots of blood which resemble pieces of liver once the fibroid enlarges. In some cases, the bleeding can be so severe that sufferers develop anaemia.

Pelvic Pain

Pressure from tumour growth can result in dull, aching pelvic pain. This sensation is sometimes reported as pain, or as a feeling of pressure in the abdomen and/or back; pain may also be experienced during sexual intercourse. Occasionally, the stem of a pedunculated fibroid may twist, blocking the blood vessels in the fibroid causing a kink, resulting in sharp, severe pain. In this circumstance, hospitalization and surgical removal of the growth will be required.

Bladder and Bowel Problems

The pressure of a growing tumour can cause bladder and bowel problems. Women may find it difficult to urinate, or conversely, experience urgent and frequent urination. The need to urinate may force women to get up several times a night resulting in sleep deprivation. Some women have reported recurring bladder and/or kidney infections. Constipation, haemorrhoids, and difficult bowel movements may all occur as the fibroid puts pressure on the bowels.

Miscarriage, Pregnancy Complications, and Infertility

Most women with fibroids have normal pregnancies. However, the possibility of a miscarriage is higher if fibroids are present. The increased blood flow to the uterus during pregnancy can cause fibroid growth. Large growths also increase the chance of premature delivery, and greater blood loss during delivery. Occasionally, a growth may block the uterus so completely that it causes infertility.

Weight Gain

Benign uterine growths can grow to large sizes without producing symptoms. This may only be detectable as gradual weight gain and distension of the abdomen, as if the woman was pregnant. As malignant tumours can also cause this type of distension, it is important to consult your doctor if you experience sudden, inexplicable weight gain.

Some additional symptoms

Ladies Issues:

Endometriosis, Night sweats, Vaginal dryness, Tender breasts, Fibrocystic breasts, Mood swings, Irregular periods, PMS, Depression, Low thyroid symptoms, Low libido, Water retention, Cyclical migraine headaches.

Men's Issues:

Prostate problems, Man boobs, Impotency, Male patterned baldness, Weight gain, Low libido.

What Causes Uterine Fibroids?

Although no precise answers exist for the development of uterine fibroid tumours, there is a link between fibroids and oestrogen production. Fibroids do not develop until the body begins producing oestrogen during the onset of menstruation. During the reproductive years, hormonal imbalance can cause fibroids to form and grow. Hormonal imbalance occurs when oestrogen and progesterone are not present in the proper proportions. The most common imbalance that causes fibroids is low progesterone in ratio to oestrogen. Progesterone production decreases during the 30s and 40s.

When additional oestrogen are introduced into the body, such as the type found in birth control pills, hormone replacement therapy and environmental oestrogens (Xenoestrogens) then hormonal imbalance may occur.

During pregnancy fibroids may grow very quickly when the body is producing extra oestrogen. After the menopause when the body stops producing as much oestrogen, Fibroids often shrink and disappear; however with the use of hormone replacement therapy over many years, this may create an excess of stored oestrogen that can prevent fibroids from shrinking after the menopause.

What are your choices?

What you eat can be crucial because it can help to control excess levels of oestrogen that can encourage the fibroids to grow.

Action Plan

A Hormone-balancing Diet

Buy organic foods where possible to avoid Xenoestrogens.

Eat plenty of:

- Fruit and vegetables
- Complex carbohydrates - wholegrain like brown rice, oats, wholemeal bread
- Phytoestrogens, including beans such as lentils, chickpeas and Soya products
- Oily foods, including fish, nuts, seeds and cold pressed oils
- Increase
- Your intake of fibre
- Plenty of fluids - Water, Herbal teas, Fresh juices - vegetable and fruit
- Reduce and Avoid

- Your intake of saturated fat from dairy products, etc.
- Additives, preservatives and chemicals such as artificial sweeteners
- Your intake of caffeine - tea, coffee, fizzy drinks
- Alcohol
- Sugar on its own and hidden in foods - refined foods (cakes, biscuits, white bread), processed foods and convenient foods.
- Red meat

Supplements

Supplements are recommended for 3 months to boost your intake of vitamins/minerals and then reviewed by your Nutritional therapist.

The idea is to use vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids supplements to help control the main symptoms (heavy bleeding), while you use dietary changes to help control the growth of the fibroids

- A good multivitamin and mineral tablet
- Vitamin C with bioflavonoid (1000mg per day)
- Linseed oil (1000mg per day)
- Vitamin B complex (providing 50mg of each B vitamin)
- Zinc citrate (15mg per day)

Tests

Tests are extremely useful, in that they can tell you what deficiencies you have at the moment and then for you to know what supplements would be useful to take to correct those deficiencies. You would then be re-tested after three to four months to monitor your progress and to adjust the supplement programme accordingly.