



# The *facts* about Fibroids



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## A SILENT EPIDEMIC HAS AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN CRYING OUT IN PAIN – THE UTERINE FIBROID.

Uterine fibroids are clusters of cells that form growths in the uterine wall. Generally, fibroids are non-cancerous, but they can cause discomfort in the form of heavy bleeding and pelvic pressure.

The exact cause of fibroids is unknown, but evidence suggests that their growth is related to estrogen and other hormones.

Connette P. McMahon, M.D., FACOG, a gynecologist at Jones Center for Women's Health says women who eat more red meat and pork are more prone to having fibroids.

"This makes sense," says Dr. McMahon, "The agricultural movement to produce bigger animals with the use of hormones may contribute to the growth of uterine fibroids."

For whatever reason fibroids grow, African American women need to be especially aware of the symptoms and treatments for uterine fibroids.

"Black women are more prone to have uterine fibroids than Caucasians or even Asians and Hispanics," says Dr. McMahon. "The literature shows that black woman are three times as likely to have fibroids as our white counterparts."

Uterine fibroids range in size from less than an inch in diameter, or the size of a grape, to the size of a melon. The larger the fibroid, the greater the risk of complications, such as heavy bleeding, cramping and pain during intercourse, pressure in the bladder and the inability to have a normal bowel movement. African American women tend to develop fibroids at younger ages and to produce larger fibroids than other women.

In general, fibroids only need to be treated if they are causing problems. But Dr. McMahon worries that women may be

suffering and not even know that they are experiencing something out of the norm.

"I see women all the time," she says. "and I ask them, 'How are your periods?' They will tell me they are normal, but when I ask how long they last, I hear, 'Seven days,' or 'Eight days.' This is not normal."

Fortunately, fibroids can be treated in a variety of ways. While a hysterectomy was the solution in years past, women today have many more options to treat uterine fibroids.

For women of childbearing age, hormone therapy is available. Though they do not shrink the fibroids themselves, birth control pills and contraception shots, such as Depo-Provera, can regulate bleeding and help alleviate some discomfort. Another contraceptive shot, Lupron Depot®, has been shown to give amazing relief.

"Lupron Depot® shuts down the ovaries at the brain level," says Dr. McMahon. "The ovaries don't receive the hormone stimulation, allowing the fibroids to shrink."

Dr. McMahon warns that Lupron Depot® can be expensive, but most insurance companies cover it and the manufacturer has an assistance program for those who need it.

There are surgical options available to women today as well. Myolysis is one such option. Myolysis is a laparoscopic, or minimally invasive, surgery in which electric current is delivered to a fibroid via needles, killing the fibroid.

An MRI-assisted ultrasonic ablation is also an option. In this procedure doctors locate the fibroid by MRI and use very concentrated ultrasound waves to pinpoint and destroy the core of the fibroid.

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– CONNETTE P. MCMAHON,  
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Dr. McMahon doesn't want fear of a hysterectomy – or fear of the doctor – to keep those with painful fibroids from seeing their physician. She urges women to make yearly appointments with a gynecologist.

"We need to put aside fear, anxiety and distrust," she says. "Go get checked out. Your doctor is your friend. Your doctor is your health advocate. We're partners in your health."



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