

Women hearing their doctors tell them they have fibroids during their annual checkup exams may think something is terribly wrong. However fibroids usually are non-cancerous and fairly simple to treat if indeed they are causing problems.

Fibroids is a term to describe a benign solid mass of the uterus. Fibroids is sometimes confused with fibrocystic disease of the breast but there is no connection. The most common problems that fibroids may cause in women are excessive bleeding, abdominal or pelvic pain, swelling in the abdomen and infertility.

These fibroids are a solid smooth muscle type of tissue that may arise in the uterus anytime after puberty. They typically are benign, non-cancerous, slow growing masses. They can be single or multiple, as large as 140 pounds (the largest ever) or so small that they are virtually undetectable.

Most women may never know they have fibroids unless they cause a problem. An estimated 25% of all women over the age of 30 and 40% over the age of 40 have fibroids. They are even more common in African-American women where half over the age of 30 have fibroids. Why or how they develop remains a mystery but we do know a few other facts concerning fibroids: (1) they do not occur prior to puberty (2) they grow bigger in women taking oral contraceptives (3) they grow rapidly during pregnancy (4) they may shrink or disappear after menopause (5) fibroids are rare in women following menopause.

Fibroids are further described according to their location within the uterus. They can live within the muscle wall of the uterus, or just below the outer surface of the uterus projecting in toward the abdomen. They can also hang down into the cavity of the uterus or near the ovaries.

Fibroids are diagnosed following a history and pelvic exam. Ultrasound is very helpful in determining the size, location and number of fibroid tumors.

If fibroids are suspected as a cause of infertility then surgical removal of just the fibroids can be done. Thus preserving the uterus. Certain medication can be used to temporarily shrink fibroids. Some fibroids can be removed within the cavity of the uterus by doing a procedure similar to a D&C. Others may require a hysterectomy to remove the uterus and fibroids all together. Naturally if a woman with fibroids is not experiencing any side effects then no treatment is necessary.