

Uterine Artery Embolization

Uterine fibroids affect about 1 out of 5 women under the age of 50. Fibroids (leiomyoma), benign growths in the uterus, may cause painful cramping, heavy menstrual bleeding and anemia. Uterine artery embolization (UAE) can relieve these symptoms. Recovery usually includes an overnight hospital stay.

Uterine Artery Embolization blocks the fibroids' blood supply and, over time, causes them to shrink.

Uterine Artery Embolization

Uterine artery embolization also is known as uterine fibroid embolization. UAE employs a method that has been used for many years to treat severe bleeding and tumors in other parts of the body. It is a method of starving or blocking the blood supply to all the fibroids and, over time, causing them to shrink.

Before UAE

UAE is done in the Interventional Radiology department by an interventional radiologist. Before this procedure, you will meet with an interventional radiologist to discuss the benefits and risks of UAE.

Night before UAE

After midnight and until 3 hours before your procedure you may have clear liquids (no milk or dairy products). For 3 hours prior to the UAE, do not have anything to eat or drink. If you take any routine medicine, talk with your doctor. As instructed, needed medicine may be taken with small sips of water.

At the Hospital

When you arrive, the nurse will prepare you for the procedure. An IV (into the vein) line will be inserted in your arm or hand. This will provide fluids and needed medication. A soft, flexible tube (catheter) is inserted into your bladder to drain your urine. The catheter remains in place for several hours. The nurse also will give you an antibiotic and medication to prevent nausea.

During the Procedure

In the Interventional Radiology department, the nurse will assist you onto a procedure table. You are connected to heart and blood pressure monitors. Medication to relax you and make you drowsy is given through the IV. Your groin area is shaved and washed with a special soap and covered with sterile sheets. Numbing medication is injected into the groin. You will feel some burning as the medication is given but once it takes effect, the area will be numb. A small needle is inserted into the groin. Through this needle, a very small catheter is threaded through the femoral artery to the uterine arteries leading to the fibroids. The radiologist then injects small plastic particles to block the blood flow to the fibroids. Once this has been done, the catheter is removed. A special suture often is used to close the puncture site. Firm pressure is applied over the puncture site for 15 to 20 minutes.

After the Procedure

After the UAE, you will go to your hospital room. You will be on bed rest for 2 to 6 hours. It is important to lie flat during this time and keep your leg straight and motionless. This prevents bleeding and allows the puncture site to close. You will be able to eat regular meals and raise the head of the bed 30 degrees. **It is very important to increase your fluid intake. Try to drink 8 oz. of water every hour while awake.**

Most patients have cramping and pain following UAE. Nausea also may occur. Medication can be given to relieve these discomforts, so be sure to tell your nurse.

After the period of bed rest is complete, the nurse removes the bladder catheter. At this time, you are encouraged to get out of bed and walk.

At Home

Complete recovery usually takes 7 to 10 days. Moderate vaginal discharge or bleeding is normal.

Activity

On the day you leave the hospital, limit your activities and get plenty of rest.

Do not drive for 24 hours. If you are taking narcotic pain medicine do not drive.

While awake drink 8 oz. of water every hour for the first week after UAE.

You may begin to resume your normal activities the day after leaving the hospital.

No physical exertion or heavy lifting (greater than 10 lbs.) is allowed for the next 3 days.

There are no restrictions on bathing or showering.

Slowly increase your physical activity. Depending on your work and its demands, you may return to work.

Check your temperature twice a day for 5 days. It is normal to have a mild increase in temperature (99° F to 100° F) for 2 to 3 days. If the temperature continues after 3 days, or if it is 101.5° F for more than 24 hours, contact your doctor.

Pain

It is normal to have pain after UAE. Take your pain medicine as directed. If it does not control your pain, contact your doctor.

Groin Site

It can take up to 14 days for the groin site itself to heal completely. The healing puncture site should remain soft and dry. A small bruise may be present. Please notify your doctor if any of the following signs appear:

- Redness or red streaks around the skin wound
- Drainage from the site
- Numbness or tingling in the thigh or leg
- Calf tenderness or pain
- Swelling of the ankle or foot
- Increased bruising extending to the thigh or over the buttock or groin
- Color change or coolness of the leg or foot

If you notice any bleeding from the puncture site, please do the following:

- Immediately lie flat.
- Apply firm pressure for 15 minutes. You may use a clean cloth or tissue to apply pressure. If possible, have another person apply pressure.
- After 15 minutes, remove pressure. The wound should be dry and flat without bleeding. Cover the wound with a bandage. Notify your doctor of this incident.

When to Call the Doctor

Contact your doctor if you have:

- Fever higher than 101.5° F for more than 1 day
- Severe persistent pain or cramping
- Heavy vaginal bleeding (soaking a pad an hour)
- Bleeding at the puncture site
- Foul-smelling drainage or persistent vaginal bleeding

The following signs could indicate that the puncture in the artery has reopened and that there is active bleeding from the artery:

- Quickly increasing swelling of the area around the wound, which may be pulsating
- Profuse blood continuously streaming from the wound
- A jet of blood pumping from the puncture wound

This would be rare, but is considered a medical emergency. **Immediately apply hard pressure above or directly on the puncture wound and seek medical attention by calling 911.**

Follow-up Care

A report of your UAE is sent to your primary care doctor and/or gynecologist following the procedure.

A magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) test is done 3 months after the UAE to check your uterus and the condition of the fibroid treated.

Please continue to see your gynecologist on a yearly basis or as suggested by your doctor. If you have any questions please call:

Interventional Radiology: 312-926-5200

Nurse Coordinator: 312-926-4415 or 312-695-0030

Health Information Resources

For more information, visit one of Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Health Learning Centers. These state-of-the-art health libraries are located on the third floor of the Galter Pavilion and on the first floor of the Prentice Women's Hospital. Health information professionals are available to help you find the information you need and provide you with personalized support at no charge. You may contact the Health Learning Centers by calling 312-926-LINK (5465) or by sending an e-mail to hlc@nmh.org.

For more information about Northwestern Memorial Hospital, please visit our Web site at www.nmh.org.

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