

Radiology

Uterine fibroid embolization provides a less invasive alternative to hysterectomy

UCLA offers uterine fibroid embolization (UFE) for the treatment of uterine fibroids, which are non-cancerous tumors estimated to affect as many as 77 percent of American women. The presence of fibroids, generally diagnosed during a gynecologic internal exam, is most frequently confirmed by an abdominal ultrasound. Magnetic resonance or computer tomography imaging techniques may also be used to confirm diagnosis.

UFE preserves the uterus and is suitable for patients experiencing increased uterine bleeding and anemia or bulk symptoms such as pelvic fullness, increased urination and/or painful intercourse. It provides an option to many of the estimated 200,000 U.S. women who undergo hysterectomy – partial or complete removal of the uterus – as treatment for fibroids each year.

Starving the fibroid, not the uterus

UFE involves insertion of a catheter into the femoral artery, which is guided, in turn, into both sides of the uterine artery. Small plastic particles are deposited into the arteries supplying blood to the fibroids. This results in shrinkage of the fibroids, while preserving blood flow to the uterus. UFE results in a 48 to 78 percent reduction in fibroid volume.

UFE should be limited to patients who do not wish to become pregnant. Myomectomy – surgical removal of fibroids which leaves the uterus intact – may be more appropriate for women who wish to preserve their fertility.

Advantages of the procedure

- shorter recovery time (typically a one-night hospital stay and a return to normal activities in one week)
- lower rates of complication than myomectomy or hysterectomy
- decreased incidence of fibroid recurrence
- simultaneous treatment of all the fibroids
- minimal blood loss
- no general anesthesia or surgical incisions

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One year following UFE, 90 percent of patients treated for bleeding report elimination of symptoms. Eighty percent of patients with bulk symptoms report improvement.

Experienced practitioners

UCLA's interventional radiologists bring years of experience to the practice of UFE. They have been performing UFE since the late 90s, when the procedure was first introduced in the United States.

Cheryl Hoffman, M.D.

Clinical Assistant Professor of Radiology

Director of Interventional Radiology, Santa Monica–UCLA Medical Center

Antoinette Gomes, M.D.

Professor of Radiology

Stephen Kee, M.D.

Associate Professor of Radiology

Chief of Interventional Radiology

Christopher Loh, M.D.

Clinical Assistant Professor of Radiology

Contact information

For referrals to the Interventional Radiology Department at Santa Monica–UCLA Medical Center, please call (310) 319-4033 and at UCLA Medical Center in Westwood please call (310) 206-4535.

www.radiology.ucla.edu