

# Fibroid Program

Inova Alexandria Hospital



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## Uterine Fibroids

The Inova Alexandria Hospital Fibroid Program is a multi-disciplinary program that offers comprehensive fibroid care for women in our community. It is an on-going collaboration between gynecologic surgeons and interventional radiologists who use a standardized screening tool to determine the best option for every woman in need of fibroid treatment. We continually monitor our performance to ensure we provide the highest quality of patient-centered care.

Uterine fibroids are noncancerous growths that develop from the muscle tissue of the uterus that often appear during childbearing years. The size, shape, and location of fibroids can vary greatly. They may be present inside the uterus, on its outer surface or within its wall, or attached to it by a stem-like structure. Women can have only one fibroid or many of varying sizes. Fibroids may remain very small for a long time and suddenly grow rapidly over a number of years.

## What Are the Symptoms?

Many women with fibroids are asymptomatic and may not know that they have fibroids, while others experience symptoms, such as pain, heavy bleeding or abdominal swelling.

The symptoms depend on the size and location of the fibroid, but may include one or more of the following:

- **Menstrual changes**
  - Heavy, prolonged menstrual periods, sometimes with clots
  - Menstrual pain (cramps)
  - Vaginal bleeding at times other than menstruation
  - Anemia (from blood loss)
- **Pain**
  - Pelvic pain, pressure or heaviness, may be sharp
  - Pain in the back or legs
  - Pain related to sexual intercourse
- **Pressure**
  - Pressure on the bladder causing a constant urge to urinate
  - Pressure on the bowel causing constipation and bloating
- **Abnormally enlarged uterus and abdomen**
- **Miscarriages**

Fibroids can occur at any age and are most common in women 30-40 years of age.



## How Are Uterine Fibroids Diagnosed?

Most fibroids are diagnosed when a physician feels an enlarged uterus during an internal gynecologic exam. Fibroids can be confirmed by pelvic ultrasound (sonogram), magnetic resonance (MRI) or computed tomography scan (CT), all of which are painless diagnostic procedures.

## Fibroids and Fertility

Fibroids may cause infertility, although other causes of infertility are more common. Other factors should be explored before fibroids are considered the cause of a couple's infertility. When fibroids are thought to be a cause, many women are able to become pregnant after they are treated.

## Types of Fibroids

Most fibroids grow in the wall of the uterus. Physicians categorize them into four groups based on where they grow:

**Intramural fibroids** grow within the wall of the uterus.

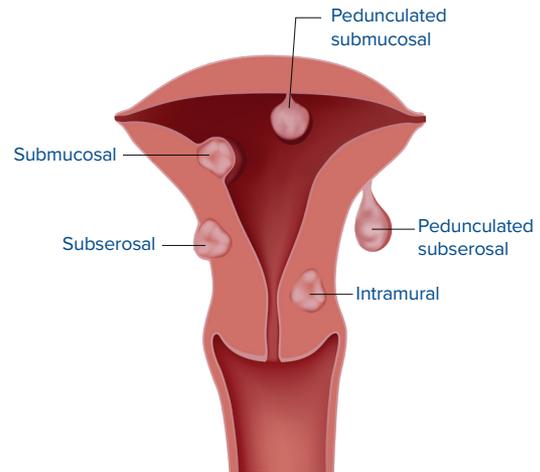
**Subserosal fibroids** grow on the outside of the uterus.

**Submucosal fibroids** grow in the inner lining of the uterus.

**Pedunculated fibroids** grow on the stalks that grow out from the surface of the uterus or into the cavity for the uterus.

Minimally Invasive Hysterectomy may be the right choice for you.

Uterine Fibroids



## Procedural Treatments that Preserve the Uterus

**Hysteroscopy:** the gynecologist inserts a long, thin telescope with a light through the vagina and cervix (the opening of the uterus). The doctor then uses electricity or a mechanical device to cut or destroy the fibroids. Although it cannot remove fibroids deep in the walls of the uterus, it often can control the bleeding these fibroids cause.

**Myomectomy** is a surgery which removes only the fibroids, not the uterus. Since the woman keeps her uterus, she may still be able to have children. This surgery is performed using a hysteroscope (a small scope inserted through the vagina and cervix), a laparoscope (a scope inserted through small incisions in the abdomen), or abdominal surgery (requiring

incisions through the abdomen and the uterus). Fibroids may regrow after surgery or women may develop new fibroids. If symptoms recur, patients may require another procedure.

**Uterine fibroid embolization (UFE)**, is a non-surgical, minimally invasive procedure performed by an interventional radiologist — a doctor specializing in the use of imaging techniques to see inside the body and treat conditions without surgery.

The interventional radiologist inserts a small tube, called a catheter, through a tiny incision in the skin, less than a quarter of an inch, into an artery at the top of the leg. They guide it into the uterine arteries and inject tiny, round particles into the blood vessels leading into the fibroids. These particles cut off the blood supply to the fibroid. Blocking the blood flow to the fibroids causes them to shrink and alleviates symptoms. After an overnight stay in the hospital, patients are back to their normal activities within an average of 5-7 days.

Inova Alexandria Hospital's Cardiovascular and Interventional Radiology (CVIR) program treats a variety of medical conditions without traditional surgery. The nationally recognized, board-certified interventional radiologists perform minimally invasive procedures that are generally less traumatic to patients than surgery, and result in less pain and shorter hospital stays. This CVIR team were some of the first doctors in the Mid-Atlantic region to perform uterine fibroid embolization (UFE). Inova Alexandria Hospital currently has one of the largest and most successful UFE programs in the country.

## Surgical Treatments that Do Not Preserve the Uterus

**Hysterectomy.** Removes the entire uterus either by a laparoscopic procedure through the vagina, or by an open surgical procedure. Uterine fibroids are the most common cause of hysterectomy in the country.

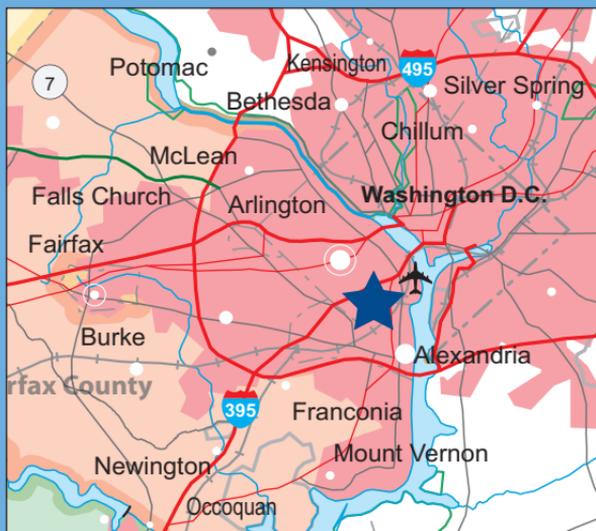
**Minimally invasive hysterectomy.** For some women, a less invasive hysterectomy is a viable option over traditional surgery. Using laparoscopic techniques, gynecologists remove the uterus with far smaller incisions. This minimally invasive technique results in less blood loss, fewer complications and a quicker recovery.

The Inova Alexandria Hospital Fibroid Program provides comprehensive care for women with fibroids. We offer many different treatment options for fibroids, including surgical and minimally invasive interventions. **For more information, about the program call 703-504-3326.**

Fibroids can be confirmed by using painless diagnostic procedures.



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*For more information please call 703.504.3326*