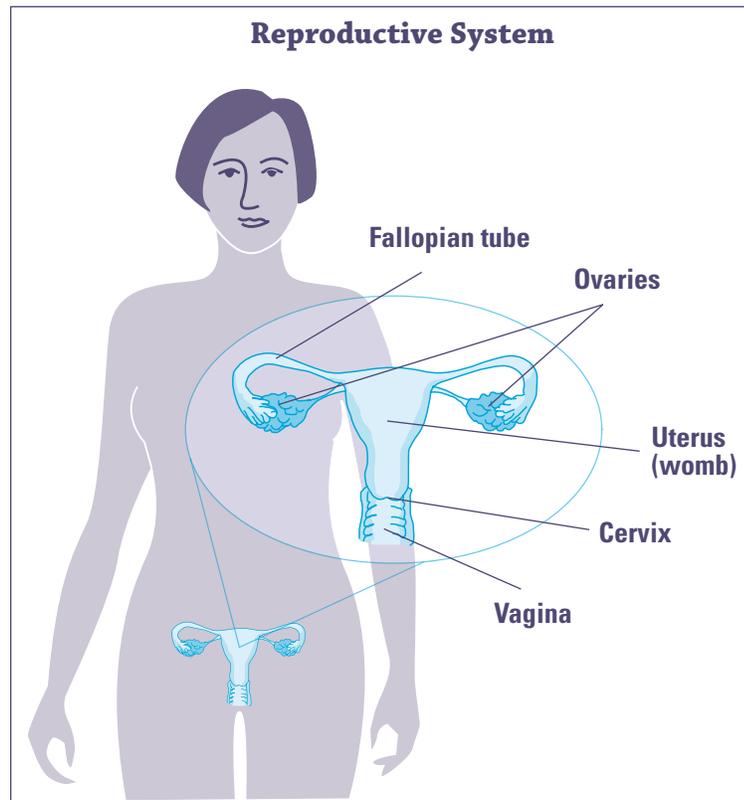


# Recognizing Problems in Your Uterus

**T**he uterus is the hollow, pear-shaped organ in a woman's body where a baby grows. Menstruation—getting your period—also begins here each month. The lower end of the uterus, or cervix, extends into the vagina. The upper part is the “body” of the uterus. The body of the uterus has two layers: an inner and an outer layer. The endometrium is the inner layer. During the menstrual cycle, or “period,” this layer builds up extra blood and tissue to get ready for pregnancy. If a pregnancy doesn't happen, the extra blood and tissue leave the body through the vagina. You then have a period. The myometrium is the outer layer of the body of the uterus. This layer has the muscle that pushes the baby out during delivery.

You may have had times in your life when you've had pain in your lower abdomen or bleeding that was different from your normal period. These symptoms can make you nervous and wonder if something is wrong. Knowing about the different health problems that can affect your uterus and knowing their symptoms can help you figure out when you should see your doctor. Be sure to see your doctor if you think you have any problems.



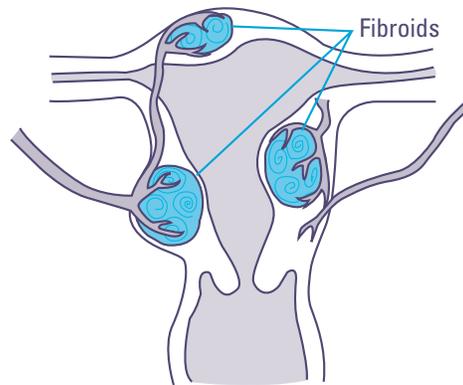
---

## Fast Facts on Fibroids

---

**What they are** Benign (non-cancerous) growths within the wall of the uterus (or womb). They are also called uterine leiomyomas.

**Uterine Fibroids**



---

**What they look like** Fibroids can grow as a single growth or in groups. Their size can vary from small, like an apple seed, to even larger than a grapefruit.

---

**Cause** No one knows exactly what causes fibroids. Fibroids often run in families.

---

**Symptoms** Most fibroids do not cause any symptoms. If they do cause symptoms, they are

- heavy bleeding or painful periods
- spotting or bleeding between periods
- feeling of fullness in the pelvic area (lower abdomen)
- urinating often
- pain during sex
- lower back pain
- reproductive problems like not being able to get pregnant, having more than one miscarriage, or having early onset of labor during pregnancy

---

### Fast Facts on Fibroids (continued)

<b>Tests</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular pelvic exam</li> <li>• Tests that create a “picture” of the inside of your body to see if you have fibroids (ultrasound)</li> <li>• Laparoscopy—surgery when your doctor places a small tube with a light inside your abdomen to see any fibroids</li> <li>• Hysteroscopy—surgery when your doctor inserts a long tube with a camera into the vagina and directly into the uterus to see any fibroids</li> </ul>
<b>Treatment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pain medicine</li> <li>• Drugs that decrease the size of the fibroids or that stop or slow the growth of fibroids</li> <li>• Surgery</li> <li>• Shrinking the fibroids by placing a freezing agent on them</li> <li>• Cutting off the blood supply to the uterus and the fibroids so they shrink (uterine artery embolization)</li> </ul>
<b>Are they cancer or could they become cancerous?</b>	Although fibroids are sometimes called tumors, they are benign and do not cause cancer.

### Fast Facts on Endometriosis

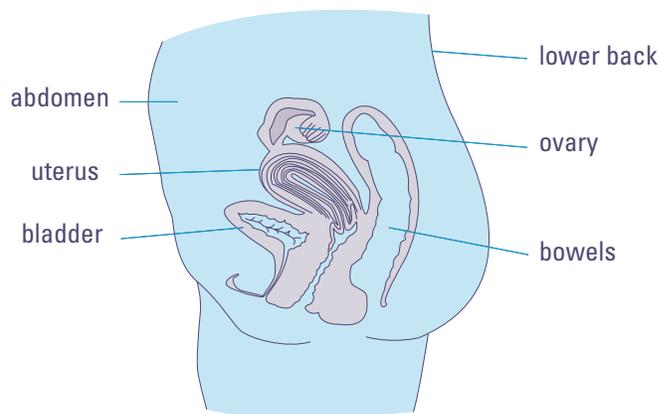
<b>What it is</b>	Each month, the endometrial tissue normally builds up in the uterus. This tissue and blood is shed as your monthly period. Endometriosis occurs when this tissue grows outside of the uterus.
<b>What it looks like</b>	Bumps, scars, or fluid-filled sacs called cysts.
<b>Cause</b>	No one knows exactly what causes endometriosis.

---

## Fast Facts on Endometriosis (continued)

---

**Where it grows** It mostly grows in the abdomen, lower back, and pelvic areas: on or under the ovaries, on the bowels or bladder, behind the uterus, on the tissues that hold the uterus in place. When endometrial tissue is *outside* your uterus, this tissue is still shed monthly. But because this tissue is not where it is supposed to be, it can't leave a woman's body the way a woman's period normally does. These areas may hurt nearby tissues and can damage your organs.



---

### Symptoms

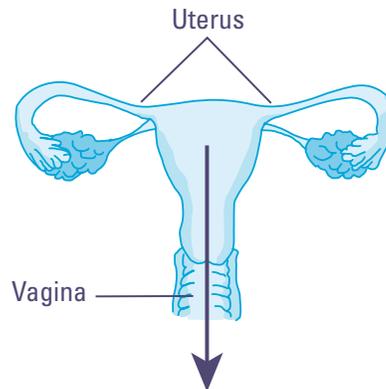
- Very painful cramps or periods
  - Heavy periods
  - Chronic pelvic pain
  - Spotting or bleeding between periods
  - Lower back pain
  - Intestinal pain
  - Pain during or after sex
  - Can't get pregnant
  - Painful bowel movements (BM) or pain passing urine during your period
  - Tiredness
  - Stomach problems
-

### Fast Facts on Endometriosis (continued)

<b>Tests</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medical history</li> <li>• Pelvic exam</li> <li>• Physical exam</li> <li>• Tests that create a “picture” of the inside of your body (ultrasound)</li> <li>• Laparoscopy—surgery when your doctor places a small tube with a light inside your abdomen to see if you have endometriosis</li> </ul>
<b>Treatment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pain medicine</li> <li>• Hormone therapy</li> <li>• Surgery</li> </ul>

### Fast Facts on Uterine Prolapse

**What it is** The uterus slips from its normal position into the vaginal canal.



**Causes** The tissues and muscles that hold up the uterus weaken. It can happen

- after one or more vaginal births
- after delivery of a large baby (more than 9 pounds)
- after hard labor and delivery
- with normal aging
- with reduction in estrogen

Obesity and chronic coughing or straining can also weaken the muscles and raise a woman’s chances of having this condition.

---

### Fast Facts on Uterine Prolapse (continued)

---

<b>Symptoms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A feeling of heaviness or pulling in the pelvis</li> <li>• A feeling like you're sitting on a small ball</li> <li>• Painful sex</li> <li>• Low back pain</li> <li>• Feeling an urgent need to urinate</li> <li>• Leaking urine</li> <li>• Painful bowel movements (BM)</li> <li>• Constipation</li> </ul>
<b>Test</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pelvic exam</li> </ul>
<b>Treatment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inserting an object into the vagina to hold the uterus in place</li> <li>• Surgery</li> <li>• Kegel exercises (squeezing your pelvic muscles as if you're trying to stop the flow of urine)</li> <li>• Estrogen therapy</li> </ul>

---

### Fast Facts on Cancer of the Uterus

---

<b>What it is</b>	<p>There are two kinds of cancer of the uterus: <i>endometrial cancer</i> (cancer that begins in the lining of the uterus) and <i>uterine sarcoma</i> (a rare cancer that begins in the muscle or other tissues of the uterus).</p>
<b>Risk Factors</b>	<p>We don't know what causes endometrial cancer. Women have a higher chance of getting it if they</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have been treated with tamoxifen for breast cancer</li> <li>• started their periods before age 12</li> <li>• start menopause after age 50</li> <li>• have heavy bleeding during perimenopause, the time leading up to menopause</li> <li>• are obese</li> </ul>

---

---

**Fast Facts on Cancer of the Uterus** (continued)
 

---

**Risk Factors  
(continued)**

- have a family history of colon cancer
  - have never been pregnant
  - have taken estrogen, without progestin, for menopausal symptoms
  - have polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS)
  - have a high-fat diet
  - have diabetes
  - are age 40 or older
  - had breast cancer or ovarian cancer
  - had prior radiation therapy to the pelvic area
- 

**Symptoms for  
endometrial  
cancer**

- Abnormal bleeding or discharge not related to your periods
  - Difficulty or pain passing urine
  - Pain during sex
  - Pain in your pelvis
  - Weight loss
- 

**Tests for  
endometrial  
cancer**

- Medical history
  - Physical exam
  - Pelvic exam
  - Biopsy—removal of tissue from the endometrium (the inner lining of the uterus)
  - D&C (dilation and curettage) or removal of tissue
  - X-ray
  - Tests that create a “picture” of the inside of your body (ultrasound)
  - Blood tests
- 

**Treatment for  
endometrial  
cancer**

- Surgery
  - Chemotherapy
  - Radiation therapy
  - Hormone therapy
-

## Hysterectomy

A hysterectomy is a surgical procedure to remove a woman's uterus. Sometimes, other organs are removed, too. A hysterectomy will stop a woman's periods if she hasn't reached menopause yet. If the ovaries are removed before a woman reaches menopause, she will suddenly enter menopause.

The different types of hysterectomies are listed below.

- ◆ A *complete* or *total hysterectomy* removes the cervix and uterus. It is the most common type of hysterectomy.
- ◆ A *partial* or *subtotal hysterectomy* removes the upper part of the uterus but leaves the cervix.
- ◆ A *radical hysterectomy* removes the uterus, cervix, upper part of the vagina, and supporting tissues.
- ◆ A *bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy* removes both ovaries and fallopian tubes during a hysterectomy.

## Do What You Can to Prevent Problems in Your Uterus

- ◆ Prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV, by practicing safer sex. *See the Protecting Your Reproductive System chapter, starting on page 74, for more information about STDs and safer sex.*

- ◆ See your doctor if you have abnormal bleeding or discharge, pain during sex, pain in your pelvic area, or pain during urination.

### Then and Now

Uterine fibroids are one of the most common medical conditions for women of childbearing age. These benign tumors can cause prolonged, heavy bleeding. In the past, doctors often recommended a hysterectomy, a major surgery that removed the uterus and made the woman unable to have children. Now, women have other options that might be right for them and that preserve their fertility. If you have uterine fibroids, but don't have any other problems, you may not need any treatment. If you have many symptoms or often feel pain, you may benefit from medical therapy, which means using certain medications rather than having surgery. If you have moderate to severe symptoms of fibroids, surgery may be the best form of treatment. Surgery can be a major or minor procedure. Talk to your doctor about the different types of treatments for uterine fibroids. Also talk about the possible risks and the side effects of the treatments. Researchers continue to look for other methods of treating uterine fibroids.