What is Uterine Fibroid Embolization?

Uterine fibroid embolization, also called UFE, is a minimally-invasive, uterus-sparing procedure that shrinks fibroids by cutting off their blood supply. A small catheter is inserted through a tiny nick in the upper thigh into the blood vessels near the fibroids and tiny Embosphere® Microspheres are injected through the catheter to block blood flow to the fibroids. On average the procedure takes about 45 minutes to an hour. UFE is performed by an interventional radiologist in a hospital or outpatient clinic. Most patients are able to go home within 23 hours after the procedure.

What are the microspheres made of? Do they stay in the body? Will they move?

Embosphere Microspheres are made of a biocompatible material, which remain in the blood vessels near the fibroids permanently. The injected particles are too large to pass through the capillary bed of the uterus or fibroids; thus preventing them from going anywhere else in the body. The particles become incorporated into the remaining non-vibrant fibroid tissue.

Once the fibroids are deprived of oxygen, the tissue softens, and slowly shrinks as the fibroids are reabsorbed by the body. Eventually the fibroids become benign, non active tissue. This tissue is no longer sensitive to hormonal changes during the menstrual cycle, which is very similar to what happens to fibroids during menopause. On average, individual fibroids and the overall uterus shrink by ~50%.

Is this procedure painful?

A local anesthetic will be administered in the upper thigh where the catheter is inserted. Patients do not feel pain during the procedure because UFE is performed under conscious sedation, which means you may be awake during the procedure but will not feel any pain. However, after the procedure, there may be some acute discomfort or cramping, which is managed with medications prescribed by the interventional radiologist to minimize this discomfort. The discomfort and cramping usually decreases and resolves over a few days.

How long will the pain (discomfort) last immediately after the procedure?

Your interventional radiologist will prescribe appropriate pain medication to minimize your pain during this time. You may experience cramping that patients describe similar to their menstrual cycle for a few days post-procedure.
How long before I can resume my normal activities?

Generally women return to most of their normal activities in about 7 to 10 days. The interventional radiologist will provide you with written post-procedure instructions to ensure that you are comfortable in your recovery. Some women recover more quickly than others, and your personal results may vary.

How long has UFE been performed in the U.S.? Is it safe?

UFE was first performed in 1997 in the U.S., but since 1995 in Europe. Embolization of the uterus has been performed for over 30 years to control post-partum bleeding and trauma.

Numerous clinical trials and reports have been conducted in the last 10-12 years and they conclude that UFE is a safe and effective procedure with excellent long-term outcomes. The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) includes UFE as a treatment option in their patient materials, which is included in the patient materials we can send to you.

Is UFE considered experimental?

No. Over 50,000 UFE procedures have been performed in the U.S. since 1997 and over 100,000 UFE’s have been performed worldwide. UFE has shown to be very effective when compared to standard surgical treatments, with less recovery time and fewer complications.

Is UFE better than hysterectomy?

In recent clinical trials, UFE was found to have similar success in controlling fibroid symptoms as hysterectomy. In most cases, UFE patients were able to go home more quickly than hysterectomy patients. In addition, UFE patients returned to normal activity much faster than hysterectomy patients. UFE patients retain their uterus while minimizing the risks associated with surgery, such as increased risk of infection, adhesions, and bleeding complications.

Can I still get pregnant after UFE?

You should not have this procedure if you are pregnant. UFE is not intended for women who desire future pregnancy. The effects of embolization of the uterine artery on the ability to become pregnant and carry a fetus to term, and on the development of the fetus, have not been determined.

While there are reports of women becoming pregnant after UFE, and having successful pregnancies, there are no scientific studies examining UFE and fertility. As with any medical intervention, you should discuss the most current clinical data with your interventional radiologist before deciding on the fibroid treatment option that is right for you.
**Will my insurance company pay for my UFE?**

Most insurance companies cover UFE as a treatment for symptomatic fibroids. Your interventional radiologist can assist you in confirming your coverage for UFE.

**Who do I call if I have any questions or problems after my UFE?**

Your interventional radiologist will advise you on how to handle your post-UFE questions. Be sure to discuss this with your IR before your UFE.

**How can I get more information?**

By calling 312-413-3737, we can send you patient information and you can also schedule a consultation with our IR physicians.

**What are some other reliable websites where I can get more information about UFE?**

www.sirweb.org www.fibroidoptions.com www.NUFF.org


www.drfibroid.com/about.htm