

ALL ABOUT YOUR PERIOD

Fibroids



Department
of Health

Your monthly period should be a normal, healthy part of life. Sure, you may not always feel at your best at this time. But if you are spending hours in pain or missing out on things you normally do because of pain, tiredness, or heavy bleeding, don't just accept it! If this is happening to you, you might have a menstrual health condition—and you can get help for that.

What are fibroids? *pronounced fīy-broyds*

Fibroids are growths that are not cancer. A growth that is not cancer is called benign (beh-NINE). Fibroids can appear on the uterus, and they can vary in size (small or large). It's possible to have just one or many fibroids. For some people, fibroids cause very painful periods with heavy bleeding. Fibroids can also cause problems related to pregnancy.

What causes fibroids?

- People with close family members who have fibroids are more likely to develop fibroids.
- People whose periods that started when they were younger than age 10 are more likely to develop fibroids.
- Eating a diet with lots of red meat or ham increases risk.
- Eating green vegetables and citrus fruit decreases risk.
- Drinking alcohol, especially beer, increases risk.
- Fibroids are most common in people age 30 to 40, but they can occur at any age. People with a uterus who are Black, develop fibroids more often than others. They also tend to be younger when they first have symptoms.

How are fibroids treated?

First, your health care provider may do a pelvic exam to see if your uterus is enlarged. This might be a sign of fibroids. They may also recommend an ultrasound. An ultrasound is a test that sends out sound waves. It creates pictures of your body's structures, such as your uterus. Ultrasounds are not X-rays: there is no radiation involved. Fibroids will show up on an ultrasound image unless they are very tiny.

The first steps in treating fibroid pain are:

- Pain medicine including ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®, and others) and naproxen (Aleve®, Anaprox®, and others).
- Hormonal birth control or other hormonal medicine: Some types of birth control work by using hormones. Hormones are chemicals that come from your body's glands or from medicine. They travel through the bloodstream to tell your organs that it's time to do something. Hormonal birth control can help you have a lighter period, with less blood flow and less pain. Examples of hormonal birth control are the pill, a ring, a patch, a shot, and certain IUDs.

How can fibroids affect me?

Some people with fibroids have no symptoms or just very minor symptoms. For others, fibroids can be very painful or uncomfortable. Fibroids may cause:

- Heavy menstrual bleeding: needing one or more tampons or pads every 1 to 2 hours for several hours in a row.
- Bleeding so much that it interferes with a person's quality of life.
- Periods lasting longer than a week.
- Bleeding in between periods, including very light bleeding, which is called "spotting."
- Severe menstrual cramps: Very painful cramps that don't get better with over-the-counter medicine like ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®, and others). and naproxen (Aleve®, Anaprox®, and others). These cramps are so bad that you must stop normal activities, such as going to school, or taking a walk.
- A feeling of pressure or dull pain in your pelvis. This is the area below your belly button in your abdomen.
- Frequently needing to pee because the fibroid is putting pressure on your bladder.
- Difficulty emptying your bladder: when peeing, it's hard to get all the pee out.
- Constipation, trouble pooping.
- Pain with sex.
- Being tired due to being anemic, having anemia (low iron) due to heavy bleeding.

These symptoms can also be signs of other conditions. If you have any of them, don't wait. Get help from your health care provider!

How do I get ready to talk to my health care provider about fibroids?

It's best to take notes on all your symptoms. Write down what is happening, when, and for how long. Take these notes to your health care appointment. To diagnose any menstrual condition, a health care provider needs to know exactly what is happening each month.

Need to find a health care provider?

Ask for help from a trusted adult, parent, guardian, or school nurse. If you or your family need health insurance, call New York State of Health at 1-855-355-5777.

This handout is part of the "All About Your Period" series on menstrual health. For more information and helpful resources, visit: <https://health.ny.gov/TeenHealth>.