

UTERINE ARTERY EMBOLIZATION EXAM OVERVIEW

WHAT IS UTERINE ARTERY EMBOLIZATION?

Uterine artery embolization (also called “UAE”) is a treatment for fibroids. Fibroids are abnormal growths of tissue that form in the uterus, the part of the woman’s body that holds the baby if she is pregnant.

UAE is also called “uterine fibroid embolization.” It works by blocking the blood vessels that supply blood to fibroids, causing them to shrink. It is 1 of several ways doctors treat fibroids.

WHY MIGHT A WOMAN GET UAE?

UAE helps ease the heavy bleeding and lower belly pressure caused by fibroids. Compared with surgery to treat fibroids, UAE:

- Takes less time
- Does not require any cuts (incisions) in the belly
- Has a shorter recovery time

WHAT ARE THE DOWNSIDES OF UAE?

Compared with women treated with surgery, women treated with UAE are more likely to need a second surgery to control heavy bleeding. UAE does not work well on certain types of fibroids. Also, women who want to get pregnant in the future should not have UAE. Your doctor can help you decide if UAE is right for you.

WHAT IF I WANT TO GET PREGNANT?

It is possible to get pregnant after UAE. But after UAE, pregnancy might not be safe for either the mother or the baby. Because of this, doctors advise women who want to get pregnant NOT to have this procedure. They also advise women to use birth control after the procedure to avoid pregnancy.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING UAE?

The doctor will then insert a thin tube (called a “catheter”) into the artery at the top of one leg and advance it up to your uterus. With the tube in place, the doctor will inject a special dye that can be seen on X-rays to show the arteries that bring blood to the fibroid. Next, the doctor will inject tiny plastic beads into the artery to block the blood flow to the fibroid (See Figure 1). Afterward, the doctor will repeat the same steps on the other side. The procedure takes about 1 hour.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER UAE?

Most women have lower belly pain and cramping after the procedure. These symptoms are usually worst the first 2 days after the procedure and can last up to 7 days. Some women have discharge or bleeding from the vagina for 2 weeks after UAE. Sometimes, the bleeding lasts for months.

Some women also:

and give you pain medicines.

- Feel sick to their stomach (nausea)
- Throw up (vomit)
- Have a fever
- Feel tired and achy

If you have these symptoms, your doctor can prescribe pain relievers and other medicines to treat them.

You should see your doctor for several follow-up visits during the first year to check that the procedure worked.

FIGURE 1

