

New breakthrough in treatment of fibroids!

Dr Rishma Dhillon Pai

Consultant Gynaecologist Lilavati Hospital & Jaslok Hospital

Fibroids are common tumours of the uterus (womb) found in over 20 % of young women. They are firm, ball like and may vary in size from pin point to very large. Fibroids are diagnosed by the history, gynaecological examination and sonography. They are named according to their position in the womb and the symptoms and problems that they cause depends on their location. Their management depends upon their size and location, the age of the patient, the symptoms the patient has and the patient's desire for children in the future.

Subserosal fibroids are those, which grow on the outer side of the uterus. These usually cause no problems unless they grow very big and patient begins to experience difficulty in passing urine or stools. The fibroids may start showing as a bulge in the lower part of the stomach if they are large and these have to be removed. This surgery can be done by the old method of making a cut on the stomach (abdomen), opening the abdomen and removing the tumour. The gap in the womb is stitched and the abdomen is closed. This method requires longer hospitalization and rest and recovery period is also longer. There is also a higher tendency to develop adhesions (intestines getting stuck to each other and the womb) by this method and this can cause long term stomach pain and sometimes infertility. Nowadays, most of the fibroids can be removed by the new method of keyhole or buttonhole (laparoscopic) surgery. By this method a telescope is put into the stomach through a very small cut on the stomach wall. This telescope has a camera attached to it and the entire operation is done by watching it on a computer screen. The surgery is cosmetic as there is no large scar. Furthermore the patient has to stay in hospital only for 2-3 days, has less pain and adhesions and can get back to an active life very soon.

Intramural fibroids lie in the middle of the womb and may cause pain during periods and sometimes problems during pregnancy if they are large. These fibroids may prevent a normal delivery or cause heavy bleeding or infection after delivery. They can be removed in the same way as serosal fibroids.

The fibroids which cause maximal problems are the **submucous** ones. These grow on the inner side of the womb - where the baby grows or the part which sheds during menses. Even small submucous fibroids can cause pain, heavy and irregular menses, infertility, recurrent abortions and difficulty in normal delivery. Even small submucous fibroids need to be removed and this is achieved by hysteroscopic surgery. A thin telescope with a camera attached to it (hysteroscope) is introduced into the womb through the vagina and the fibroid is shaved off. This can be done using a machine called a resectoscope or the new technique using the versapoint. The versapoint is a laser like device with which the fibroid can be vaporized. This is a safe and efficient system.

For the first time in Asia, there is now a method to treat the common problem of fibroids, without surgery. According to Dr Rishma Dhillon Pai, till now, fibroids could only be treated by operation but now with the introduction of the **MRI guided focused ultrasound (MRgFUS)** at Jaslok hospital in Mumbai for the first time- there is an alternative. Treatment of fibroids can now be done without surgery, hospitalization and anaesthesia. The procedure is done under MRI guidance, takes 1 – 2 hours and most fibroids can be comfortably treated. This technique uses heat energy to stop the blood going to the fibroid and hence causes it to reduce in size. As the MRI is a very accurate technique, the fibroid is properly localized and a fine beam of ultrasound waves is focused on the fibroid raising temperature within it so as to cause necrosis. Continuous monitoring of the temperature within the fibroid is done so as to get best results.

The patient has no pain during or after the procedure. She is able to go home the same day and can resume work the next day. Soon after the MRI, the patient's symptoms improve and gradually the fibroid reduces in size.

Patients who are high risk for surgery or those who are scared to undergo an operation can now walk in, treat their fibroids and walk out without an operation. The womb (uterus) is preserved and so is fertility, that is, the patient can safely have children in the future if they want. The procedure has a very low risk of complications and hence is a simple, safe and effective treatment for fibroids.

If the woman is older, has multiple fibroids and has completed her family, the entire uterus along with fibroids can be removed. This can be done by opening the abdomen (laparotomy) or by laparoscopy.

Since fibroids may be found in women of all ages from those in 20's to those in their 50's, it is good for all women to have regular gynaecological check ups even if they have no symptoms.

Email: askthedoctor@rediffmail.com

Website: www.fibroidsindia.com