

Understanding Hysterectomy

What is a Hysterectomy?

Hysterectomy is an operation to remove a woman's uterus. Sometimes the ovaries, fallopian tubes and cervix are also removed. These organs are located in a woman's lower abdomen. The cervix is at the lower end of the uterus. The ovaries are organs that produce eggs and hormones. The fallopian tubes carry eggs from the ovaries to the uterus. The uterus (womb) holds and nourishes a baby until birth.

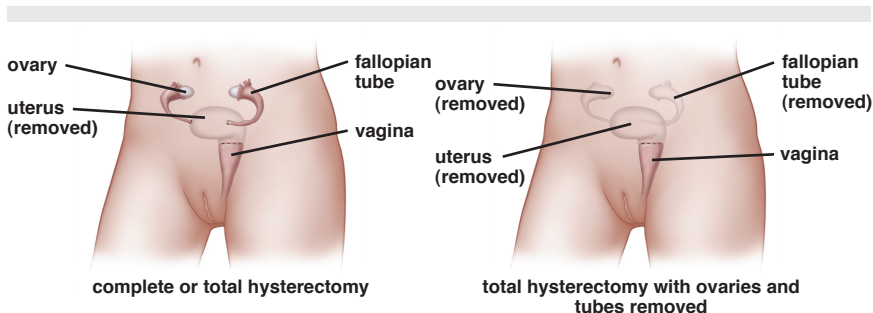
Why do women have hysterectomies?

A hysterectomy is performed for serious problems like cancer of the uterus. It is also used for other problems of the uterus, after all other treatments have been tried and do not work. A hysterectomy can be offered for the following reasons:

- **Uterine Fibroids:** common, benign (non cancerous) tumours that grow in the muscle of the uterus. Most fibroids do not cause problems and shrink after menopause, but others may cause heavy bleeding or pain.
- **Abnormal Uterine Bleeding:** heavy or irregular bleeding from the vagina
- **Uterine prolapse:** the uterus sags down and falls into the vagina. This is caused from weak or stretched muscles and tissue.
- **Endometriosis:** a condition where endometrial tissue (the inside lining of the uterus) begins to grow on the outside of the uterus and on nearby organs. This condition may cause painful menstrual periods, abnormal vaginal bleeding, and cause problems becoming pregnant. Endometriosis usually improves after menopause.

What are the different types of hysterectomy?

- A *complete* or *total* hysterectomy removes the cervix as well as the uterus. This is the most common type of hysterectomy.
- A *partial* or *subtotal* hysterectomy (also called a *supracervical* hysterectomy) removes the upper part of the uterus and leaves the cervix in place. This means you still need to have regular Pap tests, which can detect cervical cancer, as part of your regular care. There is no evidence to support the belief that keeping the cervix helps or maintains your sexual response better than a total hysterectomy.
- A *radical* hysterectomy removes the uterus, the cervix, the upper part of the vagina, and supporting tissues. This is done in some cases of cancer.
- Sometimes one or both ovaries and fallopian tubes are removed at the same time a hysterectomy is done. When both ovaries and both tubes are removed, it is called a *bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy*.



How are Hysterectomies done?

A hysterectomy can be performed in two ways: through an incision in the abdomen (*abdominal hysterectomy*) or through the vagina (*vaginal hysterectomy*). Sometimes, the doctor uses a laparoscope (a viewing device inserted through your navel) to guide the procedure. The choice of procedure will depend on the reason for the surgery, your general health and your surgeon's preference.

How will a Hysterectomy affect you?

A hysterectomy is major surgery and you will usually need four to six weeks to recover. There is a risk of developing an infection or internal bleeding with the surgery. It is normal to have vaginal bleeding requiring a sanitary napkin for a few weeks but after that your periods will stop forever and you cannot get pregnant. Most women do not find any difference in their sexual response after a hysterectomy and many actually find it is improved. It is common to have feelings of loss after the uterus is removed. If both your ovaries are removed along with the uterus, then your menopause will start at the time of the surgery. Symptoms of the menopause might include hot flashes, night sweats or vaginal dryness. Lubricants or hormones can be used to help. If your ovaries are not removed, then usually you will not undergo menopause until your natural time, some time in the future.

Last word

A hysterectomy is just one way to treat uterine problems. Before you decide if it is right for you, talk to your health care provider about your condition and what other options are available. If you decide a hysterectomy is needed, learn about how it may affect you, discuss the risks of the surgery and discuss with your healthcare provider what procedure is best for you.

www.benignuterineconditions.ca



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