

### What is Uterine Artery Embolization (UAE)?

This procedure is also known as Uterine Fibroid Embolization (UFE). It is one of several treatment options for symptomatic uterine fibroids. Uterine fibroids are very common benign (non-cancerous) uterine growths. Most fibroids do not cause any symptoms, but some do cause problems, which can include:

- Heavy periods
- Pelvic pain
- Pelvic pressure or heaviness
- Pain during intercourse
- Back or leg pain
- Constipation and bloating
- Bladder pressure and frequent urination

Treatment is generally not necessary for fibroids that do not cause symptoms. Many kinds of treatment are available for symptomatic uterine fibroids, one of which is Uterine Artery Embolization.

Uterine artery embolization is not an operation. There is no cutting (no incisions are needed), and you are not asleep during the procedure (although you will be given drugs that make you sleepy). UAE is done by Interventional Radiologists in a special x-ray room called an Angiography suite.

The uterine artery embolization procedure is done through the circulation by putting a needle into a blood vessel. This can be done using a blood vessel at the top of the leg (usually the right leg) near the groin or by using a blood vessel in the wrist. A needle will be used to freeze the skin over the blood vessel. When the area is frozen, a needle will be put into the blood vessel. Once this is done, the doctor will slide a tiny tube called a catheter into the blood vessel, and this tube will then be guided to the blood vessels that go to the uterus.

When the catheter is in the uterine blood vessels, the doctor will inject tiny particles through it. These particles will be carried with the blood into the smallest branches of the uterine blood vessels where they will lodge and block the blood flow. This blocking of blood vessels is called embolization.

By reducing the blood flow to the uterus, the fibroids will shrink. This happens over a period of several weeks to months.

### Before coming to Niagara Health for your UAE

You will be asked to bring your medications with you, in their original container if possible. A detailed list including dose, how often you take them, date and time last taken is also acceptable. This includes any over the counter or herbal medications you take on a regular basis.

If you are on any blood thinners, your physician who has referred you for this procedure will give you directions regarding these medications. Sometimes, certain blood thinners need to not be taken for a few days before a UAE.

If you are coming as an outpatient, you will need to have a responsible person drive you home. If possible, arrange to have someone stay with you overnight.

Do not eat anything from midnight the night before your procedure. You may have clear fluids 2 hours before hand. This includes ONLY water, clear tea or coffee, apple juice.

### Day of Your Procedure

You will be asked to arrive at the hospital 1 ½ hours before your scheduled procedure time.

You will go to Central Patient Registration in the main lobby. The registration clerk will ask you for your health card and ask you several questions.

From there, you will be directed to report to Surgical Services which is located on the second floor. From the elevators, you will follow the hallways straight ahead of you with the blue line on the floor. The Surgical Services door is on your right hand side. There are signs above the door to guide you. At any time, don't hesitate to ask any staff member if you need assistance.

In Surgical Services, give your name to the nurse at the desk, and a procedural nurse will call you.

This area is called Day Stay. Before your test, the nurse will assess you, ask you several questions, start an intravenous and answer any questions you may have. You can bring one family member into Day Stay with you. From this area, you will be taken to the procedure room.

### What to expect during your procedure.

You will receive some medications before the procedure to help you feel relaxed.

The Interventional Radiologist will use either the blood vessel in your wrist, or your groin to do the procedure. A needle will be used to freeze the skin over the blood vessel. When the area is frozen, a needle will be put into the blood vessel. A tiny tube called a catheter is placed into the blood vessel, and this tube will then be guided to the blood vessels that go to the uterus.

When the catheter is in the uterine blood vessels, the doctor will inject tiny particles through it which will travel into the smallest branches of the uterine blood vessels where they will lodge and block the blood flow. This blocking of blood vessels is called embolization.

### What happens after the procedure?

You will be taken back to the Day Stay Area where you will rest quietly in bed to recover. The amount of time you must remain and recover in this area varies from person to person, but on average is 2 – 3 hours.

You **MUST** have a responsible adult accompany you home and stay with you overnight. You will not be allowed to drive, operate heavy machinery or make any legally binding decisions for 24 hours following the procedure because of the sedative medication / pain prescriptions used during and after the procedure.

### Over the next few days you may:

- Have cramps that come and go, most severe for 24 hours
- Feel very tired
- Feel nauseated (feeling you're going to throw up that comes and goes)
- Possibly have a fever (a temperature up to 38°C or 100.5°F)

These are all normal side effects of the procedure as your body reacts to the embolization of the fibroid tissue. Usually these symptoms are noticeable in the first 2 or 3 days. By the fourth or fifth day after the procedure you will start to feel better. Usually, these symptoms will not last longer than 7 days. The cramps may continue for a few days longer. Because of these symptoms, most patients will need about 3-4 days off from work.

**Recovery and Follow up:**

- You will feel better over the next few days, but you should expect to have less energy or feel very tired. So, be sure to do less activity. It is best if you do not travel for two weeks and do not travel overseas for 1 month or until you feel completely recovered. A follow up appointment will be made to see the Interventional Radiologist 10-14 days after the procedure
- In order to reduce the risk of endometritis (infection of the lining of the uterus) we ask that you refrain from douching, tampon use or intercourse for at least 3 weeks after your UAE procedure
- Your next period after UAE may be delayed, and your cycle will almost certainly be disrupted and irregular over the next few months. Spotting after UAE is common and can last up to 6 weeks.
- In most cases a follow-up MRI is done six months after UAE. The booking department will call you with this appointment. You will follow up with your referring doctor as scheduled.

**Further Information**

Please contact Niagara Health Interventional Radiologist 905-378-4647