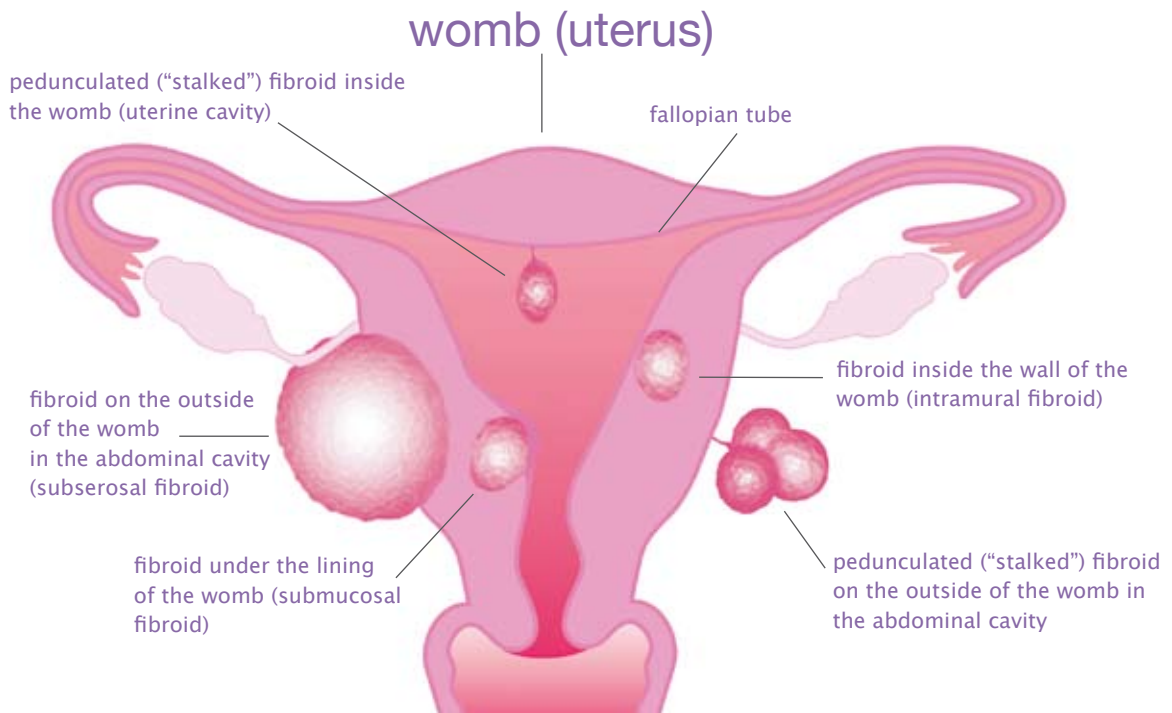


Uterine fibroids (myomas)

Uterine fibroids affect a lot of women. Fibroids are benign growths not cancer. They grow on different parts of the womb (uterus), as you can see in this illustration:



Cause:

Nobody knows for certain why uterine fibroids form. However, it is clear the formation of fibroids depends on the presence of female sex hormones.

Symptoms:

Many fibroids cause few or no complaints. In these cases, treatment is not necessary.

If you experience **very heavy or prolonged menstrual periods**, this might be caused by uterine fibroids. In such cases, it is important that you ask a doctor to check that you have enough iron in your blood. If not, you might have to take iron supplements.

Especially the **larger fibroids** can cause the following complaints: pressure in the lower abdomen, pain – also back pain or leg pain, and a tendency towards constipation or an urgency to urinate. You may experience these complaints more severely during physical exertion, sport or sexual activity.

Pregnancy:

It is perfectly possible to have fibroids and still become pregnant. Sometimes, fibroids change the shape of the inside of the womb (uterine cavity). In this case it may be useful to remove the fibroids surgically before you decide to become pregnant. In most other cases it is not.

Menopause:

The menopause occurs over a period of several years. It begins as early as a few years before you cease to have your period. No new fibroids grow after menopause. This is why women just before or during menopause are faced with these questions: How severe are my complaints? Is it possible to live with them for the next several years, and live well? Or is treatment required now?

Sometimes it helps if women follow a healthy diet. Herbal teas, made from e.g. ladies' mantle (alchemilla), millfoil (achillea) and shepherd's purse (capsella) can alleviate pain. Soothing movement and relaxation exercises for the pelvis can also be beneficial, e.g. those used in belly dancing or Luna-Yoga®.

There are hormone replacement medications that are supposed to stop fibroid growth. And there are various surgical procedures. The type of surgery performed depends on where the fibroids are located, and on their size. In most cases, it is possible to remove the fibroids and preserve the womb (uterus).

Some doctors recommend women to have their uterus removed (hysterectomy). This is one possible type of surgery, but often it is not necessary at all. You might want to discuss it with another doctor or a counsellor first.

Author: Karin Schöning, FrauenGesundheitsZentrum München (Munich Women's Health Centre). You can access personal counselling and advice here, including an interpreter: www.fgz-muc.de And there is a [book on fibroids](#) available in German. The Sponsor: Techniker Krankenkasse 