

Patient Information

Vaginal Hysterectomy

Women's Services



Introduction

A hysterectomy is a surgical procedure to remove the womb (uterus). You'll no longer be able to get pregnant after the operation.

If you haven't already gone through the menopause, you'll no longer have periods, regardless of your age. The menopause is when a woman's monthly periods stop, which usually occurs from the ages of 45 to 55.

What is a vaginal hysterectomy?

The uterus is removed through the vagina so there is no need to make an incision (wound) on the abdomen. The uterus and cervix (neck of the womb) are removed and the ovaries and fallopian tubes are usually left behind. If you are still having periods, it is best to leave the ovaries behind (unless they are abnormal) so that you have a natural menopause.

Why do I need this operation?

Hysterectomies are carried out to treat conditions that affect the female reproductive system, including:

- heavy periods;
- long-term pelvic pain;
- non-cancerous tumours (fibroids);
- ovarian cancer, uterine cancer, cervical cancer or cancer of the fallopian tubes;
- prolapse.

A hysterectomy is a major operation with a long recovery time and is only considered after alternative, less invasive treatments have been tried.

What are the risks and complications of vaginal hysterectomy?

There's a small risk of complications, including:

- heavy bleeding;
- Infection;
- damage to your bladder or bowel;
- serious reaction to the general anaesthetic.

Complications include:

- Damage to the bladder or ureter (tube from kidney into bladder). This affects 2 in every 1000 women;
- Haemorrhage requiring blood transfusion - this applies to 2 in every 100 women;
- Damage to the bowel - this affects 5 in every 1000 women;
- Return to theatre due to bleeding or due to wound problems. This affects 20 in every 1000 women;
- Pelvic abscess or infection - this affects 3 out of every 1000 women;
- A blood clot in leg or lung can occur – this affects 1 in every 1000 women.
- Recurrence of prolapse – affecting 1 in every 100 women;
- New or continuing bladder problems.

Some complications may mean that further treatment or surgery is required. Your doctor will speak to you about this.

What do I need to do before the operation?

Try to get yourself into the best physical condition that you can, to help improve your post-operative recovery. Try to cut down or stop smoking. Eat healthily and take regular exercise.

Please make plans for your home arrangements before you are admitted, e.g. shopping, childcare, laundry and housework.

Please note that in the week or so following your surgery you are advised to carry out limited/restricted physical activity at home.

What is a the pre-operation assessment visit?

You will be seen in this clinic for us to take a medical history, and to see an anaesthetist if needed. There will be blood tests, and an E.C.G. (electrocardiogram - tracing of your heart) may be done. An explanation will be given to you about your operation and about what you can expect between coming in and going out of hospital.

Will having a hysterectomy affect my sex life?

Removing your womb should not affect your sex life after the operation. In fact, many women report an improvement in their sexual pleasure after having a hysterectomy. This may be because the reason for having a hysterectomy, i.e. prolapse, pain, prolonged heavy bleeding, etc., is removed. Having a hysterectomy should not affect your sex drive (libido) unless your ovaries are also removed.

You can usually begin to have sex again about six weeks after the operation. You obviously will no longer need to use any form of contraception after a hysterectomy.

How will I feel straight after the operation?

You will be given painkillers for the first few days, both whilst in hospital and also to take home with you. You'll be able to eat and drink within a few hours of having the operation.

You are likely to have a catheter (a thin tube going into your bladder which drains urine) in for 24-48 hours. It is very common to have some light bleeding from the vagina which can last for up to six weeks. If you have a vaginal pack inserted this will be removed in 24 hours.

How long will it be before I can return to normal?

This varies from person to person. You are likely to need to rest more than usual for a few weeks after the operation. Full recovery commonly takes around 6-8 weeks but it is not unusual for women to take three months until they feel fully back to normal.

You should not drive until you are safe to do an emergency stop. This is usually around six weeks after the operation but you should check with your insurance company. The time before you can return to work will depend on your job. You can discuss this with your doctor or gynaecologist.

Will I still need to have cervical screening tests?

You will no longer need to have cervical screening tests after vaginal hysterectomy if you have been on routine screening for the last 10 years, and no smear abnormality has been detected during these 10 years.

If you have been on routine screening for less than 10 years and have no CIN (abnormal smear test) in the cervix: A smear at six and 18 months from the vault (vagina) is performed by your GP, with no further follow up required if both of these vault smears are negative.

If you have had a hysterectomy for CIN and the abnormal cells are completely removed (as confirmed by histology), you will need a vault smear at six and 18 months after the hysterectomy. If these are reported as normal, no further smear tests are required.

If the histology of the removed womb and cervix does not confirm a complete excision, the follow-up smears will be performed as if the cervix is still in situ.

However, if you have had an operation that leaves your cervix in place (subtotal hysterectomy), then you may be advised to continue having cervical screening tests until the age of 65.

Any further questions?

If you have any questions, or concerns about having the operation, please contact the gynaecology ward:

Ward 10A North, Lister Hospital

☎ 01438 286193

Further help and information

Hysterectomy Association aims to provide clear, concise information about hysterectomy and related issues for women undergoing, or planning to undergo surgery. The intention is to ensure that women make informed choices about their surgery.

For more information visit www.hysterectomy-association.org.uk

Women's Health

Health Enquiry Telephone Line: 020 7251 6580

Monday to Friday, 9.30am -1.30pm

Email: health@womenshealthlondon.org.uk

or visit the website: www.womenshealthlondon.org.uk

Additional information

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Hysterectomy

Useful contact telephone numbers

Gynaecology Ward 10AN, Lister Hospital

☎ 01438 286193

content supplied by



Date of publication: April 2012

Author: R. Bedford

Reference: Vag hyst

Version: 03 (March 2017)

Review Date: March 2020

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