

OBSTETRICS &
GYNAECOLOGY

5 things about uterus removal

It's estimated that one in five women will have a hysterectomy at some point in their lives. This article talks about what this common procedure is all about and when it becomes necessary.



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Definition and causes

A hysterectomy is an operation where a woman has her uterus removed. It may be done for various reasons. Hysterectomy may be required in the following scenarios:

- Fibroids that cause pain, bleeding and other complications
- Uterine prolapse (the uterus slips from its original position into the vaginal canal)
- Endometriosis
- Uterine, ovarian or cervical cancer
- Abnormal vaginal bleeding
- Chronic pelvic pain
- Adenomyosis (thickening or enlarging of the uterus due to endometrial tissue growing into the muscular wall of the uterus)

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Types of hysterectomy procedures

The reason for the hysterectomy is a key factor for a surgeon to remove the whole or a portion of the uterus:

- **Supracervical or subtotal hysterectomy:** only the upper part of the uterus is removed, and the cervix is kept intact
- **Total hysterectomy:** the entire uterus and cervix are removed
- **Radical hysterectomy:** generally done only in the presence of cancer, the whole uterus and its side tissues, the cervix and the top portion of the vagina are removed

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Surgical techniques in hysterectomy

There are several techniques to performing a hysterectomy, depending on the size of the uterus and medical condition of the patient. These include:

- **Laparoscopic hysterectomy:** using a laparoscope, surgical tools are inserted through either several small cuts in the belly or a single cut in the belly button, and the procedure is viewed on a video screen
- **Open abdominal hysterectomy:** the most common approach to hysterectomy, the uterus is removed via a 13–18cm incision made in the belly, leaving a visible scar at the incision spot
- **Vaginal hysterectomy:** an incision is made in the vagina to remove the uterus; the incision is then closed, leaving no visible scar

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Choosing the right approach

Compared to the traditional open abdominal hysterectomy, laparoscopic and vaginal hysterectomies are minimally invasive procedures. Generally, minimally invasive procedures offer faster recovery, less pain and scarring, and a lower chance of infection than an abdominal hysterectomy; the risk of incisional hernias is also smaller. However, not every woman may be suitable for a minimally invasive procedure. Obesity, health condition and the presence of scar tissue from previous surgeries are important factors in selecting the best approach.

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Other accompanying procedures

A hysterectomy may be combined with other procedures, such as oophorectomy (removal of ovaries) and salpingectomy (removal of fallopian tubes). Reasons for these additional procedures include removal of ovarian cysts, cancer treatment, endometriosis, or an ectopic pregnancy.