

# Women's Stuff

We may live a bit longer than men, but there's no getting away from it – women often have a generally tougher time health-wise. Apart from mystifying differences like the fact that females are three to four times more likely to suffer from gallstones, migraines and autoimmune disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis, it often has something to do with having complicated plumbing that's hidden away on the inside – not to mention being the only ones able to bear the babies. And that's why – soon after hunting down a like-minded GP with a holistic approach – it's a good idea to find a trusted gynae, too.



## TUMMY TROUBLE

Fertility and IVF specialist DR KELLY LOI's interests also include pregnancy care and minimally invasive laparoscopic keyhole surgery. She answers our questions on that most common of troubles: uterine fibroids.

**What are fibroids?**

Fibroids are typically non-cancerous tumours that form in the wall of the womb. Though their exact cause is unclear, they're linked to high levels of oestrogen, the female reproductive hormone produced by the ovaries. Fibroids usually develop during a woman's reproductive years (from approximately 16 to 50 years of age), and tend to get larger with time until she reaches menopause.

**And their symptoms?**

Depending on their size and location, fibroids may manifest in different ways. Heavy and painful menstruation is one; or you may experience urinary symptoms if the fibroid is located near the bladder. And if the fibroid is pressing on the bowels, it could be causing bloating and constipation.

**How do you assess the presence of fibroids?**

Fibroids may start off as small as little grapes – difficult to see on an ultrasound scan; but they can grow to be as large as watermelons, easily felt as a swelling in the abdomen.

**What are the options for treatment?**

**Conservative treatment** involves observation with repeat ultrasound scans every few months to ensure that the fibroids remain stable in size. Fibroids that are large or grow rapidly are at more risk of undergoing cancerous change.

**Medical treatment** usually involves medication to relieve symptoms such as heavy or painful menstruation.

**Surgery** may sometimes be the best option, especially where medical treatment is not working. Surgery can be performed by minimally invasive laparoscopic surgery or sometimes hysteroscopy, depending on the size and location of the fibroid.

**Gynae and Health Screening**

- Regular preventative health screening is important as it allows women to detect problems early and prevent them from becoming serious illnesses.
- The wide range of holistic screening packages available can be tailored to meet the needs of different women at various stages of life.
- Based on your age and health concerns, you can select from a range of general health screening packages. In addition, there are available more specialised gynaecological screening packages, including pre-conception and fertility health screening.
- Gynaecological screening generally includes a Pap smear and an ultrasound scan of the pelvis to assess the ovaries and uterus for the presence of cysts and fibroids.

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