

Hysterectomy

What is a hysterectomy?

A hysterectomy is a surgical procedure to remove the womb (uterus) through the abdomen, vagina or laparoscopic ally (using a camera inserted through small incisions in the abdomen). There are different types of hysterectomies: subtotal (the womb only), total (womb and cervix) and radical (womb, the upper part of the vagina and fallopian tubes). Please note the laparoscopic hysterectomy is only carried out if the abdominal or vaginal hysterectomy procedures are not suitable.

Who can benefit from having a hysterectomy?

There are various conditions or symptoms when women may need to undergo a hysterectomy. These include heavy periods, tumors, particular cancers and endometriosis, among others.

Procedure

The two main hysterectomy procedures – abdominal and vaginal – are performed under general anesthetic.

- ✓ **Abdominal hysterectomy** - An incision is made across the lower abdomen and the womb removed. The top of the vagina is then sewn up, followed by the abdominal incision (sometimes dissolvable stitches may be used). A catheter (tube) is inserted into the bladder to drain any urine as some women may find it difficult to physically pass urine following their hysterectomy. Tubes may also be left in the abdomen following surgery to drain any build-up of fluids.
- ✓ **Vaginal hysterectomy** - A vaginal hysterectomy is usually the preferred method as the recovery period is shorter and the surgery not as invasive. This type of hysterectomy is performed in the same way as the abdominal surgery, minus the abdominal incision. Instead an incision is made in the vagina to reach the womb, which is removed back through the vagina.

Recovery period

Depending on the type of hysterectomy procedure, you will need to stay in hospital for up to three days, and any drainage tubes should be removed around 48 hours after surgery. It is normal to be aware of a brownish vaginal discharge and/or light bleeding following your hysterectomy. Depending on the type of hysterectomy, you may begin the menopause shortly after surgery. It is normal to experience mood swings following the hysterectomy. You should avoid sexual intercourse for around two months and driving for six weeks. It may take around two weeks to fully recover from a vaginal hysterectomy, and between 8-12 from an abdominal hysterectomy. Please be aware, you will no longer have any periods or be able to have children.

Risks

Complications ensuing from a hysterectomy include infection, bleeding, incontinence, pain during intercourse and damage to other organs. Bowel and bladder injuries, breathing problems as a reaction to the anesthetic, lowered sex drive and opening of the wound are other potential risks associated with having a hysterectomy.