

Usdaw

Campaigning
For Equality

Women's Equality Women's Health – Hysterectomy



An advice leaflet
for Usdaw Members



What is a hysterectomy?

There are several different kinds of hysterectomy, all of which involve surgical removal of the uterus (womb).

The type of operation a woman will have depends on the reason a hysterectomy is considered necessary. It is, therefore, very important for women to discuss with their doctor the reasons why a hysterectomy is needed, the type of hysterectomy that is being recommended and what to expect after the operation.

- A total hysterectomy means removal of both the body (corpus) and neck (cervix) of the womb (uterus). It is the most commonly performed type of hysterectomy in the UK.
- Removal of the uterus alone, leaving the cervix in place (sub-total or partial hysterectomy). This is uncommon and means that you must continue to have cervical smears.
- Removal of the uterus plus fallopian tube(s) and ovary(ies) (removal of the ovaries is called oophorectomy). It is often possible to keep one ovary, or even part of an ovary, which means that your body can still produce important hormones.
- Removal of the uterus plus the upper portion of the vagina and sometimes some lymph nodes. This is relatively rare and is usually used in the treatment of cancer.

Why a hysterectomy?

Thousands of women every year face the prospect of having a hysterectomy and undergo what is a major operation.

There are many reasons for a hysterectomy operation:

- Painful, heavy or irregular periods which have failed to respond to other treatment.
- Fibroids which are non-cancerous growths of the womb muscle.
- Prolapse of the womb, where the womb becomes displaced.
- Endometriosis – a condition in which the tissue lining the womb (endometrium) grows elsewhere – for example, on the ovaries.
- Severe recurrent or untreatable pelvic infection.
- Cancer of the vagina, cervix, endometrium, fallopian tubes or ovaries.

Preparing for a hysterectomy

Some women may feel only relief at the prospect of an operation which promises to eliminate a serious health problem, while for others it may represent a real worry. Understanding why hysterectomy is necessary can help you to come to terms with these feelings. Some hospitals have hysterectomy counsellors who offer advice and support. Your family doctor or health visitor may be able to advise you. It may help to take along your partner/best friend to talk to the doctor or counsellor so that those at home understand why you are having the operation and how to help you afterwards.

Talk to other women who've already had a hysterectomy. Don't forget the friendship and support you can get from your workmates and through the Union.

Remember, it is wise to get into good physical shape before any operation so, take advice about smoking, diet and exercise.

Getting over the operation

- Even if you are prepared for hysterectomy and did not expect to feel upset and depressed, you may cry frequently and unexpectedly in the first few days after surgery. (This may be due to sudden hormonal changes.) Take your time to deal with these feelings and try to talk about them with family and friends.
- Even if your ovaries are not removed, there is a slight chance of sudden or premature menopause. Hormonal responses vary from one woman to the next. Some women experience severe hot flushes and vaginal dryness. Your doctor may suggest hormone replacement therapy (HRT). This type of treatment can be administered in different ways and is prescribed to suit the individual needs of each woman. There are risks associated with HRT which must be taken into account when discussing whether to have this form of treatment. You may want to ask your doctor to refer you to a specialist menopause clinic.
- If you have had a hysterectomy for cancer, it is important that you are clear about how you will be cared for in the medium and long-term. In some circumstances you may need to continue to have smear tests. Your hospital will advise you. It is essential that women know how, when and where they will be recalled for checks. Make sure you know the details of these arrangements. If in doubt, consult your doctor or clinic.

Complete recovery

Don't be impatient. Hysterectomy is a major operation. Full physical recovery can take some time and some women can feel tired for many months after surgery. Take your time to deal with your feelings and to get back into your normal routine. Take care of yourself and get family and friends to take extra care of you.

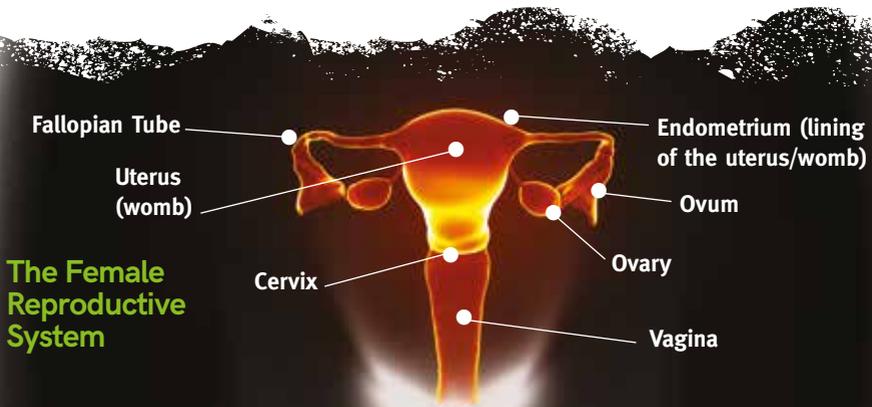
Aftercare is vital to long-term recovery and health. This means taking careful note of your doctor's advice about work around the house. It also means following your doctor's advice about returning to work with your employer, especially if you have a heavy, strenuous and tiring job. If you are concerned about this, get in touch with your rep or Area Organiser to discuss arrangements for returning to work.

For further information

The following organisation offers more information on hysterectomy:

The Hysterectomy Association
Bakehouse Cottage
Clifton Maybank
Yeovil
BA22 9UZ

email: info@hysterectomy-association.org.uk
web: www.hysterectomy-association.org.uk



Usdaw contacts

To find out more about the work of the Divisional Equalities Forums and Usdaw's equality work or about joining Usdaw contact:

South Wales and Western Division

Cardiff Office
Tel: 029 2073 1131
email: cardiff@usdaw.org.uk

Eastern Division

Waltham Cross Office
Tel: 01992 709280
email: walthamx@usdaw.org.uk

Midlands Division

Redditch Office
Tel: 01527 406290
email: redditch@usdaw.org.uk

North Eastern Division

Leeds Office
Tel: 0113 232 1320
email: leeds@usdaw.org.uk

Scottish Division

Glasgow Office
Tel: 0141 427 6561
email: glasgow@usdaw.org.uk

Southern Division

Morden Office
Tel: 020 8687 5950
email: morden@usdaw.org.uk

North West Division

Warrington Office
Tel: 01925 578050
email: warrington@usdaw.org.uk

Equalities Section

Usdaw
188 Wilmslow Road
Manchester M14 6LJ
Tel: 0161 224 2804
email: equalitymatters@usdaw.org.uk



Improving workers' lives –
Winning for members
www.usdaw.org.uk/equalities

Usdaw

Campaigning
For Equality