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Best Practice & Research Clinical Obstetrics and Gynaecology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/bpobgyn



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Epidemiology and Risk Factors of Uterine Fibroids



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A B S T R A C T

Keywords:

Uterine fibroids
Risk factor
Epidemiology
Reproductive history
Genetic factors
Lifestyle

Risk factors, both modifiable and non-modifiable, are associated with the development of fibroids. These include age, race, endogenous and exogenous hormonal factors, obesity, uterine infection, and lifestyle (diet, caffeine and alcohol consumption, physical activity, stress, and smoking). Some of the epidemiological data were conflicting; consequently, further studies are needed to better understand the factors that influence fibroid prevalence.

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Introduction

Uterine fibroids are the most common pelvic tumor in women. Despite the high prevalence, the pathogenesis, incidence, natural history, and risk factors are far from being completely understood. Nevertheless, fibroids are a significant health care burden on women's health: among 15–54 year-old-women, fibroids accounts for 29% of gynecologic hospitalizations [1]. Furthermore, fibroids account for 40%–60% of all the hysterectomies performed and for 30% of hysterectomies among young women 18–44 years of age [2]. Nonetheless, there are several challenges in understanding the epidemiology of fibroids. The first issue is that fibroids are often asymptomatic: about 30%–50% of the premenopausal women who had no previous diagnosis have ultrasound evidence of fibroid tumors [3]. The large amount of undetected fibroids creates a strong bias in epidemiological data and evidence on associated risk factors. Another important source of confusion is that there is still no universally accepted system of classification of fibroids. In recent years, the FIGO classification system for the classification of

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abnormal uterine bleeding has been developed to facilitate research and clinical care [4]. In this system, a subclassification is specifically designed to describe the different types of fibroids. Hopefully, the FIGO classification will provide a guide for international epidemiological data collection and research. The most relevant studies in progress are related to the risk factors (Fig. 1) and are summarized in the present study.

Risk factors

Age

Age is a significant risk factor for the development of fibroids. The incidence of pathologically diagnosed fibroids increases with age and reaches a peak at 50 years. Myomas do not occur before puberty, and their frequency decreases with menopause [5]. The data on young (19–35 years old)

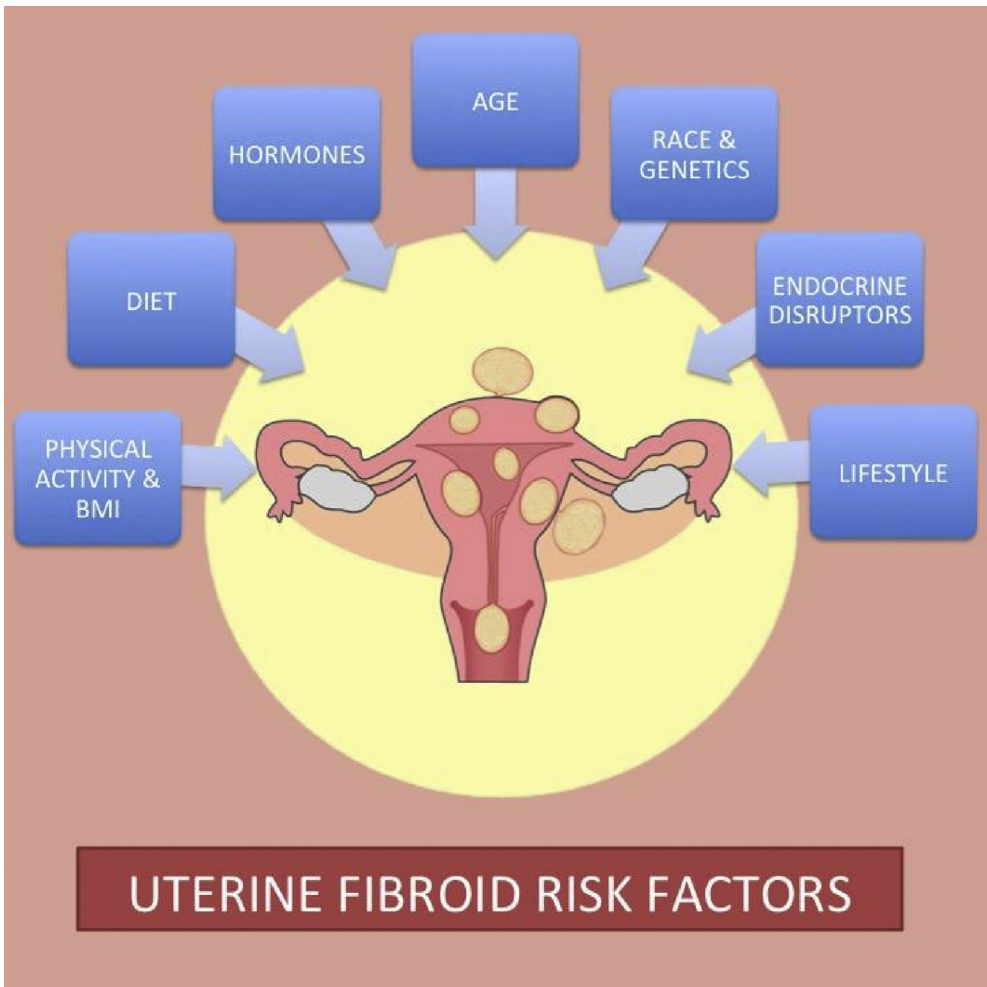


Fig. 1. Risk factors affecting the incidence of uterine fibroids.

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