

# Esther: Living with Fibroids

Esther: It was over a decade ago, I was just graduating from college, and I thought, "I've never been to a gynecologist. Let me actually go get checked." I'm told by the provider, "You have a septum." So, that was a pretty big shock to me because I just wasn't given any explanation. I never heard what the term was. It sounded scary. We found out the septum split my vagina, my cervix, and my uterus in two, but more importantly, it was going to impair my ability to carry a baby to term. We started with all of the tests to evaluate exactly where it was, how the surgeons wanted to operate on me, and that's when they actually found fibroids and adenomyosis.

Fibroids are non-cancerous growths that grow in or around the uterus, and then adenomyosis means that the lining of the tissue of the uterus isn't actually growing in the uterus itself, but in the lining which can cause infertility and can also make periods much more painful. Fibroids, specifically, were what affected me the most. My periods were so heavy. This continued on for months. I was bleeding for three weeks out of four. I was in pain, but also just so tired, and it turned out that with how much I was bleeding, I had actually become anemic. It was really impacting my life.

I remember feeling really angry that I was being precipitated into decisions that I wasn't ready for. Looking back, I actually feel grateful that I started being able to think about my fertility preservation, my thoughts around did I want children or not and my health early on because it turns out that I have many conditions that I need to manage now, 10 years plus later. I actually ultimately went through egg freezing because I realized I was basically confronted with this idea that I didn't want to have children before my mid-30s, but I also knew that the later you wait, it could cause some challenges in terms of getting pregnant and trying to conceive latter.

As I started thinking more about fibroids, I also realized if I regrow these, could it be more difficult to carry? Would I want to carry a child? It was a lot of thoughts that I had. Ironically, this happened before I met my now husband and was actually a topic that I think brought us together. It was an interesting way for us to kind of think about our futures and how we thought about what it meant to bring children into the world and be parents.

Pedro: As we spent more time together, as I learned to see how she thought about life, our values were very aligned, and one of those things was how we looked at family, how she thought about preserving fertility and was thoughtful about being a parent.

Esther: So my husband and I are hoping to start a family next year. It could be difficult for us to get pregnant. I have frozen eggs, and we have a DAF if we wanted to for two children. So a lot of what I've been focused on is making sure that my body feels good and is at a place where I hear from my providers, "Hey, your levels all look good." So now, it's a bit more about timing and continuing to manage a healthy lifestyle. I clearly am prone to regrowing these fibroids. I think my lifestyle changes have helped me manage them to stay small, but not necessarily, and there isn't enough, unfortunately, research to understand why they regrow.

So I started cutting out gluten last year out of my diet, and it made a pretty huge difference. Although I will admit, there's no necessarily research right now that links fibroid growth with gluten consumption. I actually do think that it has helped me manage my current fibroids to the size that they are, which is very small, and something else that I've done is cut out red meat. Basically, fibroids sort of thrive off of additional hormones

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that are being packed in there. The other one which I think is helpful is limiting alcohol. From a fitness and a movement standpoint, I have moved more towards gentle movement and low-impact activities.

The challenge that I've had is finding resources or sometimes even other women who may have had fibroids to connect on what we can do to prevent that regrowth or to think about those lifestyle changes. I've started working on a community called MyAdvo, so I'm hopeful that in a year from now, our community has grown into the thousands of women with PCOS, fibroids, and endometriosis, and we've connected this really amazing network of women where they don't have to feel like I did at 21, and they feel like, "Oh, I can meet someone who's just like me going through this."

Pedro:

One of the things I love about Esther is her drive and passion, and MyAdvo is definitely a reflection of that. It's something that she feels not just as a business, but like a personal mission to help other women in finding a solution through her health journey.

Esther: Society-wise, we're told not to talk about our periods. We're told not to talk about our health. We're told to basically keep this pristine image, and that is just not the reality. And so, the one thing I recommend other women do is stay loud about your health, stay in communication with other women, and make sure that you keep talking about what's happening to you because you don't know how your story can actually be such a light for another woman.