

The Creative Power of the Uterus and its Link to Uterine Fibroid

According to Vedic philosophy, *shakti*, the primordial cosmic energy or sacred force, is the personification of divine feminine creative power. *Shakti* manifests actively through female embodiment, although it is also present in males in its potential form. It bestows the energy of creation and fertility and is the agent for all change. Within the female body this creative power is most dynamic in the reproductive system and particularly expressive through the uterus.

The physiology of the reproductive system as a whole is governed by *pitta* and *apana vata*, yet the organs themselves are endowed with the qualities of *kapha*. *Kapha* is the growth-promoting (anabolic), structure-forming *dosha* that generates and sustains creation. Together with *rasa dhatu* (plasma tissue) it offers the nourishment required to rebuild the endometrial lining and has an unctuous quality that lubricates the uterus and its 'sister' organs (e.g. ovaries, fallopian tubes, vaginal canal). *Kapha* also offers stability and strength to the uterus, particularly via its muscle tissue, which maintains uterine shape, tone and power to contract.

The Sanskrit word for uterus is *garbhashaya*: the vessel (*ashaya*) that holds the foetus (*garbha*).

However, this vessel is also the holder of a woman's creative power; the power she uses to create, nurture and sustain a child, as well as to consciously create her own life and thus fulfil her life-purpose. A woman's menstrual cycle allows her to tangibly connect to her creative power on a monthly basis. The cycle is a flow of two energetically opposite phases: a more inward, reflective, emotionally sensitive phase prior to and during menstruation that naturally flows into a more outgoing, vibrant, energetic, sexually stimulated phase during the rest of the cycle. The inward phase allows a woman to get in touch with and clear any unresolved emotions she is holding, so that she can connect with clarity to her creative energy. During the outwardly orientated phase she can then bring that creative power out into her world and consciously use it to purposefully create her life.

To understand this process, let us look first at

emotions. According to Ayurveda, the seat of our emotions is *hrdaya* (heart). Women have an additional emotional centre: the uterus, which acts as a second portal for accessing emotions. Emotions are directly connected to our needs and desires. We all take birth with inherent needs and desires and life is our opportunity to fulfil them through creating experiences. Every experience we have is associated with an emotion, which is simply the feedback from our higher self or soul as to whether an experience met or did not meet a particular need or desire. Essentially, emotions are therefore neither good nor bad, as we commonly judge them to be, but simply indicators for the usefulness of our experiences.

They signify whether an experience worked for us (met our need and therefore felt 'good') or did not work for us (did not meet our need and thus felt 'bad').

When a woman is premenstrual, the portal to her emotional centre is more open. She feels therefore more vulnerable and is naturally drawn inward. This is a time when she is intimately in touch with her emotions, particularly those she may have suppressed in the 'vessel' of her uterus. At this time her tongue may get 'loosened' and words may 'slip out' as

unresolved sadness, grief, fear or anger are aired, often uncontrollably. If she holds her focus inward now to fully acknowledge and confront these emotions, she has the opportunity to discover their deeper roots, which are her unmet needs or unfulfilled creative desires. This opportunity for insight into the roots of our emotions is the gold that our cycle offers. If a woman views her premenstrual phase in this constructive way and sets out to actually fulfil the needs and desires she has identified, she proactively claims her creative power, matures in her womanhood and feels more fulfilled and happy in her life. She can also experience a positive relationship to her menstruation and enjoy menstrual health.

Unfortunately, we have been culturally conditioned to label certain emotions and their release as wrong or unwanted, and therefore shun away from exploring their root. Consequently, many



generations of women have not been taught to value the different emotional phases of their menstruation. Out of ignorance our culture has even coined menstruation as 'the curse', viewing it as an unwanted nuisance as opposed to a golden opportunity for emotional clearing. When a girl enters puberty, the responsibility of her mother (or women that were influential in her upbringing) is to initiate her into her womanhood; to teach her the wisdom of her menstrual cycle and be the role model she requires to inspire the discovery of her feminine creative power. Women who lacked this experience and guidance, tend to internalise or suppress their emotions and thus feel emotionally disconnected. For many the consequence is a feeling of loneliness, emptiness or powerlessness. Such dysfunction in the emotional physiology of the uterus, if left unaddressed, may eventually also lead to physical dysfunction within the uterus: *kapha* and *vata doshas* become vitiated, physiological functions of the reproductive system get disturbed and disease arises. A common pathology to develop when a woman's emotional or creative energy is suppressed is the growth of uterine fibroids.

Uterine fibroids or myoma are benign tumours that originate from the smooth muscle layer and accompanying connective tissue of the uterus. Most fibroids develop in an intramural location (within the muscular wall of the uterus), but some also develop on the outside or in the internal cavity of the uterus. Myomas are the most common tumours found in the genital tract and affect more than one in four pre-menopausal women. Although the majority of fibroids remain small and asymptomatic, one third grow considerably in size, can weigh over 10kg and are a major source of morbidity in women. Fibroids constitute a common indication for surgery, are a leading indication for hysterectomy and can seriously complicate pregnancy.

According to Ayurveda, a uterine fibroid or *raktagulma* is caused by over-production of improperly formed *kapha* and aggravated *apana vata*. Due to excessive mental stress, long-term emotional suppression, lack of exercise and the consumption of *kapha* and *vata*-exacerbating foods (particularly devitalised junk food, wheat, refined sugar and excess dairy), the digestive fire gets vitiated and *dushita kapha* (or improperly formed, non-viable *kapha*) is produced (see Prana Winter 2008 issue for an article on *dushita kapha* and its role in women's health). This *dushita kapha* gets carried by *vata* into the reproductive system where it is unable to conduct its normal physiological functions. Instead it accumulates, blocks the movement of *apana vata* and gets pushed by vitiated *vata* into the muscle tissue of the uterus. As a result dysfunction in cellular intelligence (*prana*) of the muscle tissue develops, leading to abnormal tissue metabolism and growth, i.e. the formation of one or several deep-seated, expansive and immovable *gulmas* (fibroid tumours).

In addition to the causative factors on the physical level mentioned above, there are also subtler causative themes consistently observed in clinical practice in women with fibroids. These themes run subconsciously and typically have to do with a desire to 'hold' something (arising from the unmet need to be held) and a need to 'fill the void' (arising from feeling emotionally empty or creatively blocked).



For example, fibroids often occur in women whose relationship with their mother is problematic and who have lacked maternal support from the most important woman in their life. They have been deprived of the experience of being held and consequently carry a feeling of loneliness and emptiness inside. It is commonly observed that uterine fibroids develop in these women as a physical attempt to 'fill the void'. A subconscious process of distorting uterine cells into creating a fibrotic mass takes place as an attempt to relieve the feeling of emptiness. Later, these women raise their own daughters in a similar way, so this pattern of mother-daughter disconnection often gets passed on through many generations. This is one explanation why fibroids tend to run in families. Some patients with this history also express an unfulfilled desire to have a child. The unmet yearning to hold and nurture another being is connected with the deeper unmet need to be held by loved ones. The creation of a fibroid acts as a cellular 'substitute' for a child and gives an

experience of holding something as reconciliation for not having been held.

Another example is that fibroids are often seen in women who have disconnected from their creativity, usually as a result of low self-esteem and a diminished sense of self-worth. Consequently their thoughts and actions tend to be self-destructive, they struggle to honour their needs and creative desires, and often have lost connection to their life purpose. They have not learnt to utilise the pre-menstrual phase as a time for emotional clearing, so eventually the disturbed creative energy distorts uterine cellular intelligence (*prana*) to the extent that a fibroid mass is created. This is simply a physical attempt to fill the creative void in their lives.

Although these themes run subconsciously, they are prominent factors in the physical manifestation of uterine fibroids. As practitioners it is important to understand this complexity in order to offer a truly holistic approach to clients.

Uterine fibroids can be detected in the radial pulse: between the *vata* and *pitta* finger (the uterus area of the pulse) a solid pulsation is felt, the area feels slightly moist and humid to touch (similar to a damp wall) and *apana vata* is pushing upwards (*pratilomana* instead of *anulomana*). The pulse also shows sluggish circulation of *rasa vaha srotas*.

The most common symptoms are weakness, abdominal swelling, bloating and heavy sensations in the lower abdomen. If these symptoms are not associated with pain, fibroids may go undetected unless the practitioner is sufficiently skilled in diagnosis of women's health issues. In some cases fibroids cause *kashtartava* (dysmenorrhoea), *katisula* (back pain), *anapatya* (infertility), *raktapradar* (includes menorrhagia and inter-menstrual bleeding), *sula* (abdominal and pelvic pain or tenderness) and anaemia, but usually patients with these symptoms already have a confirmed diagnosis following scans.

A comprehensive and holistic treatment for women with uterine fibroids must be two-fold: treating the physical manifestation and associated symptoms,

and simultaneously addressing the causative psycho-emotional factors.

Treating the physical manifestations involves Ayurvedic formulations, cleansing treatments, diet and lifestyle changes that will correct the quantity and quality of the *doshas*, balance the movement of *apana vata*, kindle *agni* (digestive fire) and stabilise *prana*. A *lekhana* (scraping, clearing) approach is required to both clear congestion from the digestive tract and channels of circulation, and to reduce the mass of fibrotic tissue.

An effective *lekhana* remedy for addressing deep-seated *kapha* imbalances is *Kanchanar guggulu*. The astringent (*kashaya*) taste of *kanchanar* helps to counteract the moist, stagnant qualities of *kapha* and, when combined with triphala, trikatu, cinnamon, cardamom and guggulu, it creates a powerful detoxifying remedy for removing excess *dushita kapha* from tissues. The formula also helps minimise future accumulations of *dushita kapha* by kindling *agni* and promoting elimination of wastes.

Other effective formulas include *Gokshuradi guggulu*, *Punarnava guggul* and *Triphala guggul*. A prescription must also include *vata*-reducing, *agni*-kindle, channel-clearing formulations.

Dietary changes are essential: avoid *vata*-aggravating, *agni*-depleting, mucus-increasing foods such as raw vegetables, cabbage, large lentils, cold foods, tomato, red meat, dairy products and raw fruits in winter. Avoid sticky, heavy, *kapha*-vitiating foods (wheat, cheese, refined sugar) and especially yogurt as this dampens *agni* and promotes *dushita kapha* due to its *abhishyandi* (water-retaining, channel-blocking) property. Also avoid refined, processed and microwaved foods, which are *agni*-depleting, *ama*-producing and devoid of *prana*.

If a client cannot undergo *panchakarma*, then 'fasting' for up to ten days on just *mung* soup, green leafy vegetables and herbal teas (nothing else!) is an effective, safe way to clear channels of excess *doshas* and *am*, rectify *agnis*, and enhance the scraping



action of the Ayurvedic remedies. Fasting on *mung* soup improves tissue metabolism and increases immunity, energy and vitality. Important also is the emotional clearing that occurs when following this programme for ten days: patients find they can observe their emotions with more clarity and feel empowered in their resolve to heal.

A series of *pindswed* full-body massages using dry boluses of ginger and *ajwain* powders is the ideal treatment in this condition, particularly if there is also abdominal water-retention, bloating, pain or poor circulation. Heart *dhara* (warm sesame oil poured over the chest around the heart area in a rhythmical fashion) is wonderful for supporting emotional clearing and to give an experience of peace, fulfilment and connection to self. Warm castor oil packs on the lower abdomen are an effective home remedy for fibroids that help break up *kapha* accumulations and congestion and reduce *apana vata*. Soak warm castor oil into a strip of cotton wool or a flannel, lie comfortably on the back, lay the cotton wool on the uterus area, cover with an old piece of cloth or a plastic bag, and place a hot water bottle on top. Lie and meditate like this for one hour and repeat the treatment every alternate day for two consecutive months.

The other essential aspect of treatment is supporting a woman to acknowledge and process her emotions, and to address and complete any unresolved past experiences with her mother or with other significant women in her life. Important also is supporting her in discovering her relationship to herself as a woman, so that she can fully embrace her creative power and that of her cycle to develop a sense of fulfilment and purpose in her life.

As few practitioners are trained to deal with the emotional complexity that underlies women's health conditions, I highly recommend the following programmes that provide unique opportunities for women to safely explore their core emotional issues: Women Within www.transitionseurope.com and Women in Power www.womeninpowerprogram.com. This work has had a profound transformational impact in my life and in the lives of all those women to whom I have recommended them to. Highly recommended also is the work of Alexandra Pope www.wildgenie.com whose Menstrual Health workshops explore the intelligence and healing power of the menstrual cycle as the template for a woman's wellbeing, fertility and empowerment.

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Dietary tips: kapha dosha

*Mix one spoon of honey and juice of one lemon in a glass of lukewarm water. Drink it on an empty stomach every morning to activate the digestive metabolism and reduce *kapha*.

*Include ginger in your daily diet: take a pinch of fresh ginger root with a few drops of lemon juice before each meal.



*Drink warm and spicy teas throughout the day when you feel thirsty and avoid cold water.

*Maintain the basic rules of healthy eating – wait until previous the meal has been digested before you eat again, eat according to your hunger, eat slowly and eat freshly prepared food.

*Favour foods that taste spicy, bitter and astringent and are light, dry and warm as these help reduce congestion and dry excess fluids in the body. Ginger is spicy, green tea is bitter and aduki beans (and all lentils/beans) are astringent whilst millet is light, barley dry and quinoa warm.

*Include natural fibre from vegetables, wholegrains, lentils and nuts to assist a slow release of energy, helping to control blood sugar levels and cravings.

*Reduce foods that are excessively sweet, salty and sour (eg cakes, crisps, vinegar). Avoid yeast, salt, cheese, yoghurt, chocolate, alcohol, refined sugars, unhealthy oils such as saturated fats in meat and fried foods as these all increase the water and earth elements that contribute to increasing *kapha*.