Singer-songwriter Asiahn Talks About Life With Uterine Fibroids

Many women with fibroids complain that often doctors don't listen to what patients say. Some are speaking up.

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At the tail end of 2018, Motown Records singer-songwriter Asia Bryant (stage name: Asiahn), then age 32, was on the threshold of launching her singing career. After several years of work behind the scenes writing songs for artists such as Miley Cyrus and Jennifer Lopez and a guest appearance on a Dr. Dre compilation album, the entertainer had released her first album and was booked for a series of performances at events in Philadelphia and Los Angeles. However, her achievements of these goals were overshadowed by a health problem. Ultrasound exam results showed that she had developed two uterine fibroids.

"I knew I'd be touring most of the year and there was no way I could tour with the kind of 'albums' I'd be dropping," she says jokingly. "That's what I call my cycle because 'period' is horrendous and 'monthly' sounds like I'm old. How could I possibly sing to my heart's content when it felt like my insides were being shredded apart?"

During her menstrual cycle, Bryant would bleed severely. She also suffered from nausea, bouts of low energy, back, leg and stomach cramps and bloating that lasted for more than a week. Initially when she had complained to doctors about these symptoms, they were quick to blame them on endometriosis, a condition that generates many of the same symptoms as fibroids,

Bryant's health providers had offered to prescribe birth control pills—to address the severe bleeding—and pain medication, "but that was about it," she says.

"Every time I complained about it to doctors, I got the same story: 'We're doing all we can. Would you like to try a different birth control?'" Bryant says. "None of the contraceptives helped. Most made me feel extremely unstable emotionally or made me feel even worse than I already did."

At the time, Bryant had begun to feel like nothing could be done about her menstrual problems. Pain and heavy bleeding were simply issues she needed to manage each month because no one could tell her what caused them.

However, not all women who develop uterine fibroids experience symptoms like Bryant's. Many

women with these usually noncancerous tumors don't require treatment, so the proportion of women with the condition might be even higher than statistics suggest.

But severe uterine fibroid symptoms can lead to both physical and mental problems. "Many women report challenges with depression, anxiety, reduced quality of life and distorted body image," says Erika Marsh, MD, the chief of reproductive endocrinology and infertility at the Center for Reproductive Medicine at the University of Michigan.

Bryant's nurse practitioner suggested she opt for a hormonal intrauterine device (IUD). This special IUD is infused with the hormone progestin, which is released into the uterus where it works to shrink fibroids. The small T-shaped device is implanted during an office visit and can help reduce heavy bleeding and pain caused by fibroids.

Bryant had resisted her health provider's advice for months after she conducted an online search about the treatment and read that some women experienced difficulties with the IUD while some did not, "so I was torn," she says.

In the meantime, her iron levels continued to dip from the amount of blood she was losing during her menstrual cycles. Bryant thought about all the plans that were pending to launch her career.

Finally, after much soul-searching, "my internal struggles reached an all-time high," Bryant says. "I decided to try out the IUD, which was the worst decision I ever made."

The first attempt to insert the device caused Bryant to feel some pain, but eventually her health provider succeeded in placing the IUD. But two months later, after being involved in a minor car accident, she went for X-rays and learned that the IUD had shifted sideways. "Not at all where it should have been," she says.

Eventually, the pain became so bad that Bryant rushed to the ER and saw an ob-gyn. The doctor suggested she get the IUD replaced and also mentioned the possibility of a hysterectomy, an invasive surgery that removes the uterus and is a permanent solution for fibroids. However, the procedure also means that a woman will be unable to have children.

Bryant chose the IUD, but less than a month later, her body expelled the new device.

Now Bryant pressed for an ultrasound. By this time, the coronavirus pandemic had struck and she was given an appointment for months later. In the interim, she experienced heavy bleeding and passed clots, which landed her in the ER again. The doctor who saw her immediately ordered an ultrasound and discussed possible treatments for her fibroids.

After questions about her reproductive plans, the doctor reassured Bryant that a hysterectomy was definitely off the table. "Someone was finally listening to what I wanted," she says.

Eventually, Bryant decided to get a myomectomy, a surgery that removes fibroids while conserving the uterus. She also decided to share her story with other women to raise awareness

about fibroids and the need to be proactive and advocate for oneself.

“While fibroids won’t kill you, they can significantly impair a woman’s quality of life,” says Marsh. “Women should feel empowered to ask questions, to get answers and to stop suffering in silence.”

As for Bryant, she’s feeling much better and making career moves in pursuit of her dreams. She currently voices the self-confident little girl Karma in the animated Netflix series Karma’s World, created by hip-hop artist Ludacris.

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