



1-877-692-SELF (7353)

[www.DetroitSELF.org](http://www.DetroitSELF.org)

Winter 2011/2012

Dear SELF Participant,

Happy New Year!

Thank you so much for your participation. A century ago, women with fibroids often died from their surgical treatment. Once surgery became relatively safe, there was little effort to find other ways to treat fibroids. That has finally begun to change. SELF is at the forefront of that change. Together we will find ways to prevent the debilitating symptoms that women endure because of fibroids.

**Thank you for being part of SELF.**

Sincerely,

Dr. Donna Baird  
SELF Principal Investigator



## Participating in SELF

- More than 1,700 calls received
- Over 700 clinic visits completed

## Where Should I Go For My Appointment?

When preparing for study visits, be sure to review the map and directions mailed with your appointment confirmation letter. Directions to clinic locations can also be found on the SELF website. Go to DetroitSELF.org and click **Contact SELF**.

## New Clinic Location Added

Henry Ford Medical Center–Detroit NW

## Online Surveys

If you opted to complete some of your study activities before your clinic appointment, you can access the online surveys on the SELF website. Go to DetroitSELF.org and click **For Participants**.

## Let's Get the Job Done!

All of the valuable information you provide to SELF will be used to determine how environmental exposures affect the chances of developing uterine fibroids. Without the help of women like you, we may never learn how to prevent this condition. Be thorough! Be complete! Your piece is critical.

## Special Request

If you received a menstrual diary, but haven't returned it, please mail it back or call us at 1-877-692-SELF (7353).

The orientation video for SELF was selected from more than 400 submissions to receive a **2011 Plain Language/Clear Communication Award** presented by the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, MD. Thanks to Carrissa Dixon (pictured below), who designed and guided this project.



## Help Spread the Word About SELF

Many women find out about SELF by word of mouth. With your help, we can reach hundreds more! Let us know what's happening in your area.

Please call toll-free **1-877-692-SELF** (7353) to:

- request free copies of brochures to share
- invite study staff to give a short presentation on SELF
- arrange for SELF study staff to participate in community events

To learn more about how to get involved, go to [DetroitSELF.org](http://DetroitSELF.org) and click **Ways to Help**.

## Infertility in Black Women

Infertility is defined as not being able to get pregnant after one year of trying. However, many couples and doctors may desire to intervene sooner than one year, while many couples who continue to try without intervention often conceive.

Approximately 60% of couples will become pregnant in the first 3 menstrual cycles, 80% within 6 menstrual cycles, and 90% of couples trying to get pregnant will do so in about 12 menstrual cycles. Half of the couples defined as "infertile couples" will get pregnant within three years without medical intervention.

Fertility decreases with age, beginning when a woman is in her 30s. One third of women age 35 and older will experience difficulty with fertility.

## What Can Impact Fertility?

Infertility among African American women has not been well studied. However, some risk factors for infertility such as obesity and tubal disease have higher rates among African Americans and may contribute to higher rates of infertility among African American women overall.

Hormonal problems including extra high or low estrogen, progesterone, prolactin, and thyroid hormones can interfere with normal ovulation and fertility. Polycystic ovary syndrome can lead to ovulatory and fertility problems due to hormonal and metabolic imbalances as well.

Problems with female organs such as damaged fallopian tubes from pelvic infections, endometriosis, and/or pelvic surgery can impact transport of the egg or sperm through the reproductive tract.

Exposure to drugs and toxic chemicals can also impact fertility such as smoking, alcohol, chemotherapy, radiation, and probably some pesticides.

## Fibroids and Fertility

The impact of fibroids on fertility is still not completely understood. Scientific evidence suggests that most small fibroids do not have any impact on getting pregnant or on miscarriage rates in women who are affected. Many doctors believe that larger fibroids, depending on location, could have an adverse impact on both the ability to conceive and pregnancy once it is implanted in the uterus. There could be miscarriage, preterm birth, and problems during labor.

Ronald C. Strickler, MD MBA, a reproductive endocrinologist for Henry Ford Health System specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of infertility. Dr. Strickler states, "The higher prevalence of fibroids in African Americans can contribute to infertility." Dr. Strickler also notes "Fibroids that are next to the inner lining of the uterus and which invade the uterine cavity are clearly associated with a decreased likelihood for conception. Also, fibroid tumors that expand against the fallopian tubes and/or change the ability of the tubes and ovary to capture released eggs contribute to infertility."

## Infertility: The Male Factor

Dr Strickler says, "Discovering male infertility in the African American population is more difficult because many men decline testing. There is a continuing myth that all infertility is the woman's fault. In reality, 40% is male; 40% is female; 20% is both partners."

## What is available?

Many doctors can assist you with the evaluation and treatment of infertility problems. They can evaluate you and your partner for hormonal problems, infections, tubal problems, sperm problems, and assist with weight loss, smoking and alcohol cessation.

Assisted reproductive technology (ART) is available and can help infertile couples. Unfortunately, ART can be costly and is not always covered by insurance.

## What's Next? First Follow-up

Follow-up study activities are critical for being able to monitor fibroid growth and development. One study visit will not be enough to answer questions about what causes fibroids. **So, we really need you to stay actively involved throughout the entire study.**

The initial enrollment process requires the greatest amount of effort and time. The follow-up visits will include similar activities, but they will take less time than the first visit. **Please be prepared to show a photo ID.**

In the coming months, you will be reminded to complete the next telephone interview and survey.



## Why does SELF ask about childhood?

The reproductive tract is formed before birth, but it does not fully mature until puberty. Environmental and health factors that might affect that maturation process may influence risk of fibroids. For example, one study suggested that babies who were fed soy formula might be at increased risk of developing fibroids by age 35. The findings are just suggestive, but we want to follow-up on such reports.

## This Is What SELF Participants are Saying...



- "I am glad to participate in this study. Fibroids affect a lot of women in my family."
- "This was the best and most professional clinic visit I have had in my lifetime!"
- "I will most definitely complete the five years of this study. Anything that helps women in the future, I am more than willing to support."
- "I love this study, what it represents, who it involves and definitely how it is so beneficial. Thank you SELF!"
- "Melissa was very sweet and friendly. She explained everything very well."
- "Debbie was the best! Liz and the sonographer were very pleasant as well."
- "Kyra was awesome. She was knowledgeable and efficient. She explained things well and kept me interested."
- "LaSalle was great. She was personable and professional. You have a great team if all of your workers are like her!"



### What does lotion or neighborhood safety have to do with SELF?

Data on these sorts of factors may help us put the puzzle pieces together. Lotions might be important because some ingredients may act as weak hormones. SELF asks about neighborhood safety because it can affect stress levels, and stress may influence fibroid development.

### LET'S STAY IN TOUCH!

Please call us at 1-877-692-SELF (7353) if your phone numbers, mailing address or email address changes.



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