



# SELF

STUDY OF  
ENVIRONMENT,  
LIFESTYLE & FIBROIDS

1-877-692-SELF (7353)

www.DetroitSELF.org

Spring 2021

Dear SELF Participant,

I hope that you have had a safe and healthy New Year.

I would also like to thank you for your continued dedication to participate in SELF: Study of Environment, Lifestyle and Fibroids during the pandemic.

SELF is in the 4th follow-up. A member of the Henry Ford study staff will contact you when it is time to schedule your Follow-up 4 activities.

In this newsletter, our health article focuses on the role of reproductive tract infections in fibroid development. Along with study updates and reminders, we share tips on managing stress and provide links to resources that may be helpful during these difficult times.

Thank you for being part of SELF.

Sincerely,

Dr. Donna Baird  
SELF Principal Investigator



## Study Update

- 1225 participants have completed all Follow-up 4 activities to date.
- The Study of Ovarian Aging and Reserve (SOAR) started data collection in October 2019. To date, 158 participants have completed SOAR clinic visits. If you are interested in learning more about SOAR, or to determine if you are eligible, give us a call or send us an email and a member of the Henry Ford team will contact you.

## Reminders

- We will continue to share SELF findings and regular study update mailings (3 times per year). Please call us at 1-877-692-SELF (7353) or send an email to [info@DetroitSELF.org](mailto:info@DetroitSELF.org) if your contact information changes, so that you will not miss these important updates.
- Let us know if any contact information changes for **your secondary contacts**.
- If you live out-of-state and will be in the Detroit area, please reach out to us as soon as you have your dates, so that we can schedule you for a SELF visit. **To thank you for your continued participation and time completing this visit, you will receive a \$150 gift card.**

## Any Questions?

Call us at  
**1-877-692-SELF (7353)**  
or send an email to  
**[questions@DetroitSELF.org](mailto:questions@DetroitSELF.org)**

## Newsletter Suggestions

We want to hear from you! What would you like to see in future SELF newsletters? Submit your ideas and suggestions to [info@DetroitSELF.org](mailto:info@DetroitSELF.org).

## ***SELF Results: No Evidence that Reproductive Tract Infections Increase Risk of Developing Fibroids***

### ***Background***

In the 1930s, researchers suggested that reproductive tract infections might increase fibroid development. Our immune systems can safely control many infections, but if poorly controlled, some can promote benign or malignant tumors. An example is Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), which causes cervical cancer by blocking gene activity that would normally protect cervical cells from becoming cancerous. Thankfully, a vaccine—now given to adolescents—can effectively prevent the infection, so the cancer doesn't have a chance to develop. Another major way an infection can promote tumor development is by causing inflammation in the tissue it invades. Inflammation stimulates new cell production to heal any damage in the infected area. However, if this "inflammatory healing" is not well-controlled, the increased cell production may lead to tumor development.

### ***Prior Literature on Reproductive Tract Infections and Fibroids***

Despite the long-standing interest in infection as a cause of fibroids, it has rarely been investigated. One suggestive report from South America found that women with Chagas' disease were more likely to have fibroids compared to disease-free women. The parasite that causes this inflammatory disease is carried by insects and enters humans when the insect bites. The parasite can then infect the skin, but then move to other tissues including the uterus where fibroids develop. Before SELF, the few studies of reproductive tract infections and fibroids had major design limitations and findings were inconclusive.

### ***SELF Findings***



Dr. Kristen Moore, here at NIEHS, has been investigating reproductive tract infections in SELF. She first asked whether any of the reproductive tract infections reported at your first study visit were associated

with having fibroids detected at your first ultrasound. She found no evidence of a link. She then examined biomarker information derived from the blood and vaginal swabs collected at your first visit to provide more detailed data on the most common infections (chlamydia, genital herpes, and bacterial vaginosis). She still found no evidence of increased fibroid development in women with a history of these infections, even when she examined all of the detailed ultrasound data collected during the five years of NIEHS follow-up.

### ***Conclusions***

Thanks to Dr. Moore's careful work, we find no convincing evidence that the common reproductive tract infections experienced by US women increase the risk of fibroid development. This work is a giant step forward due to the high quality of data from SELF that allows us to use ultrasound to assess both new fibroid development and fibroid growth—

**ALL THANKS TO YOUR  
DEDICATION AS PARTICIPANTS!**



## Mindfulness & Managing Stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Mindfulness is something we can all cultivate by paying attention to our experience of the present moment, which includes our body sensations, emotions and thoughts. Some experiences are pleasant and others unpleasant, even painful. Instead of reacting to what we experience, mindfulness teaches us to cultivate wiser, more compassionate ways to relate to our life experience.



During the current pandemic, there is so much uncertainty concerning the future. It is totally natural and normal to feel anxious, fearful, and frustrated. Those are all normal and natural reactions to this abnormal situation. Mindfulness can help us acknowledge this situation, without allowing us to be carried away with strong emotions. Mindfulness also shows us how best to proceed, with compassion towards oneself and others.

Some examples of cultivating mindfulness are through mindful meditations, which can be guided or done in silence. For a few minutes to 30-40 minutes, sit quietly, and become aware of the sensations of breath and body, as well as sounds, thoughts, and emotions, in a non-judgmental way, with compassion towards oneself.

<https://medicine.umich.edu/dept/psychiatry/michigan-psychiatry-resources-covid-19/adults-general-resources/mindfulness-managing-stress-during-covid-19-pandemic>

## Helpful Resources



Families may face hardships concerning food insecurity, income loss, and dealing with virtual learning during these pandemic times. The SELF team has provided the links below to help connect you with resources to deal with these problems. Please visit the SELF website at [DetroitSELF.org](http://DetroitSELF.org) for more information on the links below.

*Michigan Department of Human Services*  
<https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/>

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*  
<https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/resources-publications/food-and-food-system-resources-during-covid-19-pandemic.html>

*FindingHelp.com (formerly Aunt Bertha)*  
<https://www.findhelp.org>



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### *Can I still complete my visit if I forget my mask?*



Masks are mandatory for clinic visits. If you forget your mask a member of the Henry Ford study staff will provide one for you when you enter the building.

#### **LET'S STAY IN TOUCH!**

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



### **What SELF Participants are saying...**

- » Debbie was great, she explained everything so that I could understand and was very nice. Bravo!
- » I enjoy being a part of something so grand, very good experience.
- » I had a pleasant experience from start to finish. Everyone who I encountered was very kind and helpful.

***Thanks for the kudos!***