

What Women Need to Know About Women's Cancers

What are women's cancers?

These are cancers that start in the organs only a woman has – like the uterus, the ovaries, and the cervix.

When these cancers are found early, treatment can help.

- Cancer of the Uterus – The uterus is an organ in the lower belly where a baby grows during pregnancy.
- Cancer of the Ovaries – The ovaries are two small organs, one on each side of the uterus. They make female hormones and store the eggs.
- Cancer of the Cervix – The cervix is the opening to the uterus. It connects the uterus to the vagina.

Women can also get cancer in the vagina, vulva, and fallopian tubes. These are less common.

What can cause these cancers?

Having too much estrogen over time may cause some kinds of cancers, especially if:

- A woman started her period before age 12.
- She started menopause after age 55.
- She has never been pregnant or given birth.
- She had a hard time getting pregnant.
- She took estrogen without progesterone for menopause.

Are there other risks?

A woman has a higher chance of getting one of these cancers if:

- She is overweight.
- She has HPV, a common infection passed by skin-to-skin contact during sex.
- She has diabetes, high blood pressure, or gall bladder disease.
- She has had problems with her uterus or ovaries.
- She has had other kinds of cancers or has a family history of cancer.

Other things a woman may do can put her at risk for some cancers. For example, if:

- She smokes cigarettes.
- She has had many sex partners.
- She has a sex partner who has had many sex partners.

Ask your doctor about what you need to know.

What should you watch out for?

Know what is normal for your body.

Watch out if you have any of these signs. Tell your doctor if you:

- Bleed, spot, or have a discharge from your vagina that is not normal for you.
- Have pain or cramps in your lower belly that do not go away.
- Feel full when you haven't eaten.
- Gain or lose weight without trying.

There are other signs.

Check with your doctor if you:

- Feel bloated or your stomach gets bigger.
- Have pain or nausea in your stomach that does not go away.
- Have pain or bleeding during or after sex.
- Need to urinate right away or more often.

These signs could also be caused by something else. Check with your doctor to be sure. Don't wait. Your health is important.

You can make a difference!

There are many things you can do to help protect yourself from these cancers.

- Ask your doctor how often you should have a check-up done.
- Get your first Pap test and pelvic exam at age 21.
- Get screened for cancer of the cervix:
 - Get a Pap test every 3 years if you are 21 to 65 years old.
 - Or, starting at age 30, you can get a Pap test along with an HPV test every 5 years.

Talk to your doctor about what these tests show. Make sure to get follow-up care or testing if you need it.

You can help protect yourself.

- Know what is normal for your body.
- Ask about the HPV vaccine.
- Stop smoking or never start.
- Eat healthy foods and keep a healthy weight.
- If you have diabetes or high blood pressure, take your medicine.
- Have sex with only one person who only has sex with you.

What if cancer is found?

There are many ways to treat these cancers. The earlier cancer is treated, the better.

- To find out more, ask your doctor.
- See your doctor if you have any signs or symptoms.
- Ask your doctor any questions you may have about your health.

Take good care of yourself for you and for your loved ones!

To learn more, visit:

- U.S. Preventive Services Task Force
www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org
- CDC Inside Knowledge Campaign
www.cdc.gov
- National Cancer Institute
www.cancer.gov/cancer
- National Library of Medicine
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

