

What Women Need to Know About Cancer of the Uterus

What is the uterus?

The uterus is an organ in a woman's lower belly. When a woman is pregnant, the baby grows in her uterus.

What is cancer of the uterus?

This cancer happens when cells in the uterus change and grow out of control. It most often starts in the inside lining. It can also start in the muscle or in other tissues of the uterus.

Why do women get cancer of the uterus?

No one knows for sure, but estrogen may have something to do with it. Every woman's body makes the hormones estrogen and progesterone. In the right amounts, these hormones are helpful.

When a woman has too much estrogen over a long time, cancer of the uterus can start. This can happen for many reasons that a woman cannot always control.

A woman has a higher chance of having too much estrogen if:

- She is overweight.
- She took estrogen without progesterone for menopause.
- She has never been pregnant or given birth.
- She started her first period before age 12.
- She started menopause after age 55.

Are there other risks?

Doctors are not sure what causes cancer of the uterus. But, a woman has a higher chance of getting it if:

- She is over 50 years old.
- She is in menopause.
- She had a hard time getting pregnant.
- She has had problems with her uterus or ovaries.
- She often had fewer than 5 periods a year when she was younger.
- She has family members who have had cancer of the uterus, ovaries, or colon.

Ask your doctor about what other health problems might put you at higher risk.

What can lower the chances of getting it?

There are many things that may help:

- Use birth control pills.
- Stay at a healthy weight.
- Keep active.
- Control your blood sugar if you have diabetes.
- Take your medicine if you have high blood pressure.
- Take progesterone if you use estrogen during menopause.

All these things may help protect the uterus.

What should you watch out for?

The most common sign of cancer of the uterus is bleeding from the vagina that is not normal. This could be any bleeding that you don't expect. Call your doctor if you:

- Bleed or spot after sex.
- Bleed between your periods.
- Have a period that goes longer or is a lot heavier than normal.

There are other signs you may notice. Be sure to tell your doctor if you:

- Bleed or spot after you've gone through menopause.
- Have any discharge from the vagina after menopause.
- Have pain or feel pressure in the lower belly.

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!

Cancers are often found because women notice changes and tell their doctors. Know what is normal for your body. If you notice changes, see your doctor.

Every woman should:

- Ask your doctor how often you should have a check-up.
- Get a pelvic exam starting at age 21.
- Get pelvic exams as often as your doctor says.
- Tell your doctor about any signs or changes you notice in your body.

What tests or exams might be done?

A Pap test or pelvic exam may help find a problem.

A biopsy can also be done to check for cancer. The doctor will take a bit of tissue from the uterus. You may feel some cramping.

The doctor may order other tests as needed.

What if cancer is found?

There are many ways to treat this cancer. Treatment may include surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, or hormones. The earlier it is treated, the better.

- To find out more, ask your doctor.
- Tell your doctor if you have any signs or symptoms.
- Ask your doctor any questions you 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