

ASCO ANSWERS

CERVICAL CANCER

WHAT IS CERVICAL CANCER?

Cervical cancer is a disease in which normal cells on the surface of the cervix change, grow uncontrollably, and form a mass of cells called a tumor. At first, the changes in a cell are precancerous (abnormal cells). If the precancerous cells change into true cancer cells and spread deeper into the cervix or to other tissues and organs, the disease is called cervical cancer. The two main types of cervical cancer are squamous cell carcinoma and adenocarcinoma. Cervical cancers can often be prevented by having regular Pap tests and treating precancers early.

WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF THE CERVIX?

The cervix is the lower, narrow part of a woman's uterus. The uterus holds the growing fetus during pregnancy. The cervix connects the uterus to the vagina and, with the vagina, forms the birth canal.

WHAT DOES STAGE MEAN?

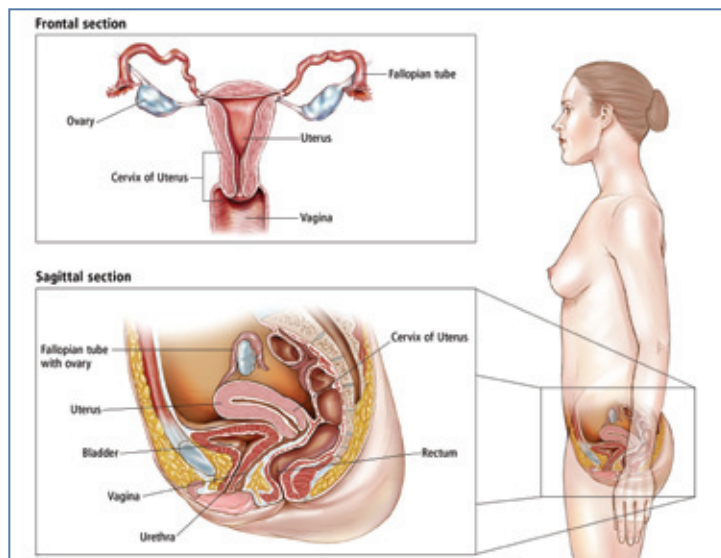
The stage is a way of describing a cancer, such as where it is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting the functions of other organs in the body. There are five stages for cervical cancer: stage 0 (zero) and stages I through IV (one through four). Descriptions of these stages are available at www.cancer.net/cervical.

HOW IS CERVICAL CANCER TREATED?

The treatment of cervical cancer depends on the tumor, whether the cancer has spread, the woman's overall health, and her desire to have children. Once precancerous cells are found, they can usually be removed without harming healthy tissue. If the abnormal cells have become cancerous, the most common treatments are surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy. Radiation therapy alone or surgery to remove part or all of the cervix may be used for a small tumor. A combination of chemotherapy and radiation therapy is often used for women with invasive cervical cancer. When making treatment decisions, women may also consider a clinical trial; talk with your doctor about all treatment options. Most side effects of cervical cancer treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health care team.

HOW CAN I COPE WITH CERVICAL CANCER?

Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your doctor are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, becoming organized, and considering a second opinion are other steps. Take care of yourself during this time. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.



Find additional cancer information at www.cancer.net.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE DOCTOR

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your health care. Consider asking the following questions of your doctors:

- What type of cervical cancer do I have?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- What stage is the cervical cancer?
- Would you explain my treatment options?
- What clinical trials are open to me?
- What treatment plan do you recommend? Why?
- Who will be part of my treatment team, and what does each member do?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- Could this treatment affect my sex life?
- Could this treatment affect my ability to become pregnant or have children?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs related to my cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?



Learn more about
cervical cancer

- What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom do I call for questions or problems?
- Is there anything else I should be asking?

Additional questions to ask the doctor can be found at www.cancer.net/cervical.

Cancer.Net™

Doctor-Approved Patient Information from ASCO®

For more information, visit ASCO's patient website, www.cancer.net, or call 888-651-3038.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Benign:

A tumor that is not cancerous

Biopsy:

Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to check for cancer cells

Chemotherapy:

The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

Colposcopy:

An examination of the cervix and vagina from outside the body with a magnifying instrument

Dysplasia:

An abnormal growth of cells

Gynecologic oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating women with cancer of the reproductive system

Human papillomavirus (HPV):

A virus spread during sexual activity; the most important risk factor for cervical cancer

Lymph node:

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Malignant:

A tumor that is cancerous

Metastasis:

The spread of cancer from where the cancer began to another part of the body

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy:

The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

Tumor:

An abnormal growth of body tissue