Uterine Cancer - Risk Factors and Prevention [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [2], 08/2014

ON THIS PAGE: You will find out more about the factors that increase the chance of developing this type of cancer. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

A risk factor is anything that increases a person?s chance of developing cancer. Although risk factors often influence the development of cancer, most do not directly cause cancer. Some people with several risk factors never develop cancer, while others with no known risk factors do. However, knowing your risk factors and talking about them with your doctor may help you make more informed lifestyle and health care choices.

The following factors may raise a woman?s risk of developing uterine cancer:

Age. Uterine cancer most often occurs in women over 50; the average age is 60.

Obesity. Fatty tissue in women who are overweight produces additional estrogen, a sex hormone which can increase the risk of uterine cancer. This risk increases with an increase in body mass index (BMI; the ratio of a person's weight and height). About 40% of cases are linked to obesity.

Race. White women are more likely to develop uterine cancer than black women.

Genetics. Uterine cancer may run in families where colon cancer is hereditary. For instance, women in families with hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer (HNPCC), or Lynch syndrome, have a higher risk for uterine cancer. It is recommended that women under the age of 60 with endometrial cancer should have their tumors tested for Lynch Syndrome even if they don?t have a family history of bowel cancer or other cancers. About 2% to 5% of women with endometrial cancer have Lynch Syndrome. In the United States, about 1,000 to 2,500 women diagnosed with endometrial cancer each year may have this genetic condition. Read about Lynch Syndrome [3].

Other health conditions. Women may have an increased risk of uterine cancer if they have had endometrial hyperplasia or if they have diabetes.

Other cancers. Women who have had breast, colon, or ovarian cancer have an increased risk of uterine cancer.

Tamoxifen. Women taking the drug tamoxifen (Nolvadex) to prevent or treat breast cancer have an increased risk of developing uterine cancer. However, the benefits of tamoxifen usually outweigh the risk of developing uterine cancer, but all women should discuss the benefits and risks of tamoxifen with their doctor.

Radiation therapy. Women who have had previous radiation therapy for another cancer in the pelvic area, which is the lower part of the abdomen between the hip bones, have an increased risk of uterine cancer.

Diet. Women who eat foods high in animal fat may have an increased risk of uterine cancer.

Estrogen. Longer exposure to estrogen and/or an imbalance of estrogen is relevant to many of the following risk factors:

- Women who started having their periods before age 12 and/or go through menopause later in life. Learn more about menopause and cancer risk [4].
- Women who take hormone replacement therapy (HRT) after menopause, especially if they are only taking estrogen, which is also an important risk factor. The risk is lower for women taking estrogen with another sex hormone called progesterone.
- Women who have never been pregnant.

Prevention

Research has shown that certain factors can lower the risk of uterine cancer:

- Taking birth control pills, especially over a long period of time
- Considering the risk of uterine cancer before starting HRT, especially estrogen replacement therapy alone
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- If diabetic, maintaining good disease control such as regularly monitoring blood glucose levels

Research continues to look into what factors cause this type of cancer and what people can do to lower their personal risk. There is no proven way to completely prevent this disease, but there may be steps you can take to lower your cancer risk. Talk with your doctor if you have concerns about your personal risk of developing this type of cancer.

To continue reading this guide, use the menu on the side of your screen to select another section.

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/uterine-cancer/risk-factors-and-prevention
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/19223
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/25069