



AMERICAN COLLEGE OF
OBSTETRICIANS AND
GYNECOLOGISTS

Cancer of the Uterus

Cancer of the uterus most often affects the lining of the uterus (endometrium). If it is found and treated early, the cure rate is very good.

What Is Cancer?

Sometimes, certain cells develop abnormally and begin to grow out of control. Too much tissue is made, and growths or tumors begin to form. Tumors can be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer).

Malignant tumors can invade and destroy nearby healthy tissues and organs. Cancer cells also can spread (or metastasize) to other parts of the body and form new tumors.

Most types of uterine cancer are adenocarcinomas. Adenocarcinomas involve cells in the lining of the uterus.

Who Is at Risk?

Cancer of the uterus is rare in women under 40 years of age. It most often occurs in women between the ages of 60 to 75 years.

Symptoms

At present, there is no simple way to detect uterine cancer at an early stage in women with no symptoms. The key to finding the disease early is being alert to its symptoms.

The main symptoms of uterine cancer are abnormal bleeding, spotting or discharge from your vagina.

Ask your doctor about any bleeding or spotting you have after menopause.

Diagnosis

Most of the methods used to diagnose cancer of the uterus can be done in the doctor's office. Methods that may be used include ultrasound or endometrial biopsy. Sometimes hysteroscopy may be done in the doctor's office with local anesthesia. The patient may have dilation and curettage (D&C) done in the hospital.

Although the Pap test should be part of a regular checkup, it is not a good test for uterine cancer.

Treatment

If cancer of the uterus is found, surgery will be done to decide the stage of the disease and how it should be treated. Staging helps your doctor decide what treatment has the best chance for success.

To treat uterine cancer, most patients have both hysterectomy and salpingo-oophorectomy. Tissue from lymph nodes in the pelvic region may be tested to find out if the cancer has spread.

If tests show that the cancer has spread or come back after surgery or radiation, your doctor may advise more drug therapy.

Prevention

There are things you can do to lower your risk of uterine cancer and improve the chance of finding it early:

- Report any abnormal vaginal bleeding promptly to your doctor.
- Get a yearly pelvic exam.

- Eat foods that are low in fat and cholesterol and high in fiber.

Finally ...

If you think you have a problem, see your doctor at once. When uterine cancer is found early, the outlook is great. This disease is much harder to cure if treatment is delayed.

This excerpt from ACOG's Patient Education Pamphlet is provided for your information. It is not medical advice and should not be relied upon as a substitute for visiting your doctor. If you need medical care, have any questions, or wish to receive the full text of this Patient Education Pamphlet, please contact your obstetrician-gynecologist.

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