

# Uterine Cancer

There are five main types of cancer that affect a woman's reproductive organs: cervical, ovarian, uterine, vaginal, and vulvar. As a group, they are referred to as gynecologic (GY-neh-kuh-LAH-jik) cancer. (A sixth type of gynecologic cancer is the very rare fallopian tube cancer.)

This fact sheet about uterine cancer is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) *National Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Campaign*. The campaign helps women get the facts about gynecologic cancer, providing important "inside knowledge" about their bodies and health.



## What is uterine cancer?

Cancer is a disease in which cells in the body grow out of control. Cancer is always named for the part of the body where it starts, even if it spreads to other body parts later.

When cancer starts in the uterus, it is called uterine cancer. The uterus is the pear-shaped organ in a woman's pelvis (the area below your stomach and in between your hip bones). The uterus, also called the womb, is where the baby grows when a woman is pregnant.

The most common type of uterine cancer is also called endometrial cancer because it forms in the lining of your uterus, called the endometrium.

When uterine cancer is found early, treatment is most effective.

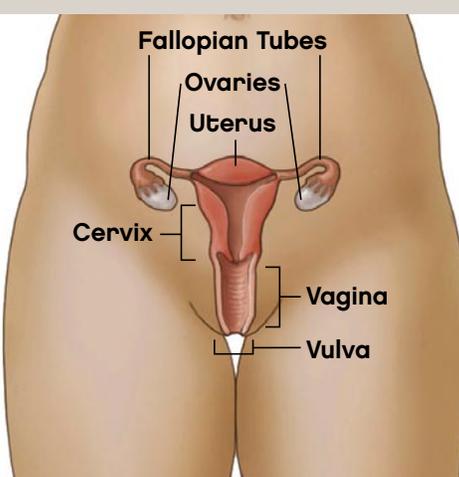
## Who gets uterine cancer?

All women are at risk for uterine cancer, but the risk increases with age. Most uterine cancers are found in women who are going through, or who have gone through menopause—the time of life when your menstrual periods stop.

In 2004,\* 36,981 women in the United States were told that they had uterine cancer, making it the fourth most common cancer in women.†

\* The most recent year for which statistics are currently available.

† U.S. Cancer Statistics Working Group. United States Cancer Statistics: 2004 Incidence and Mortality. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Cancer Institute; 2007.



## What are the signs and symptoms of uterine cancer?

**The most common sign of uterine cancer is bleeding that is not normal for you because of when it happens or how heavy it is. This could mean bleeding, even a little bit, after you have gone through menopause; periods that are longer than seven days; bleeding between periods; or any other bleeding that is longer or heavier than is normal for you.**

**Other symptoms, such as pain or pressure in your pelvis, may also occur if you have uterine cancer. If you have any of these symptoms, talk to your doctor, nurse, or other health care professional right away. They may be caused by something other than cancer, but the only way to know is to see your doctor.**

*Inside Knowledge* is an initiative that supports the Gynecologic Cancer Education and Awareness Act of 2005, or Johanna's Law, which was unanimously passed by the U.S. House and Senate (109th Congress) in December of 2006, and signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 12, 2007.

## What raises a woman's chance of getting uterine cancer?

**There is no way to know for sure if you will get uterine cancer.**

**Some women get it without being at high risk. However, several factors may increase the chance that you will get uterine cancer, including if you:**

- Are older than 50.
- Are obese (have a high amount of extra body fat).
- Take estrogen by itself (without also taking the other female hormone, progesterone) for birth control or to replace hormones during menopause.
- Have had trouble getting pregnant, or have had fewer than five periods a year before starting menopause.
- Take Tamoxifen, a drug used to treat certain types of breast cancer.
- Have people in your family who have had uterine, colon, or ovarian cancer.

**If one or more of these things is true for you, it does not mean you will get uterine cancer. But you should speak with your doctor to see if he or she recommends more frequent exams.**

## How can I prevent uterine cancer?

There is no known way to prevent uterine cancer. But these things may lower your chance of getting uterine cancer:

- Using birth control pills.
- Maintaining a healthy weight and being physically active.
- Asking your doctor to prescribe progesterone (the other female hormone) if you are taking estrogen to replace hormones during menopause.
- Talking with your doctor about how often you should be checked for uterine cancer, especially if you think that you have factors that increase your chance of getting it.

## Are there tests that can find uterine cancer early?

There is no simple and reliable way to test for uterine cancer in women who do not have any signs or symptoms. The Pap test does not check for uterine cancer. This is why you need to know the signs of uterine cancer and see your doctor if you have any of them.

See your doctor right away if you have bleeding from the vagina that is not normal for you. Ask your doctor if you should have an endometrial biopsy. This test involves removing a tiny piece of the lining of the uterus to check for signs of cancer. Your doctor may be able to do this test in his or her office, or may refer you to another doctor. If you still have bleeding after an endometrial biopsy, your doctor may perform more tests.

## What should I do if my doctor says I have uterine cancer?

If your doctor says that you have uterine cancer, ask to be referred to a gynecologic oncologist—a doctor who has been trained to treat cancers like this. This doctor will work with you to create a treatment plan.



## Where can I find more information about uterine cancer?

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** 1-800-CDC-INFO or [www.cdc.gov/cancer](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer)

**National Cancer Institute:** 1-800-4-CANCER or [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

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