

The American Cancer Society is the nationwide community-based voluntary health organization dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by preventing cancer, saving lives, and diminishing suffering from cancer, through research, education, advocacy, and service.

No matter who you are, we can help. Contact us anytime, day or night, for information and support.

Cancer Facts for Women

1.800.ACS.2345
1.866.228.4327 (TTY)
www.cancer.org

Hope. Progress. Answers.®



The cancers that most often affect women are breast, lung, colon, endometrial, ovarian, cervical, and skin cancers. Knowing about these diseases and what you can do can save your life.

Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is the most common cancer that women may face in their lifetime (except for skin cancer). It can occur at any age, but it is much more likely to occur after age 40 and as you get older. Because of certain factors, some women may have a greater chance of having breast cancer than others. But if you are getting older, you should know about breast cancer and what you can do about it.

What You Can Do

The best defense is to find breast cancer as early as possible, when it is easier to treat. Finding breast cancer early is called “early detection.” The American Cancer Society recommends the following for early detection:

- Women should have mammograms each year starting at age 40 and continuing for as long as they are in good health.
- A breast exam by a doctor or nurse should be part of a regular health exam and should be done at least every three years for women in their 20s and 30s and every year for women 40 and older.
- Women should report any breast change to their doctors without delay. Breast self-exam (BSE) is an option for women starting in their 20s.

The American Cancer Society recommends that some women – because of their family history, a genetic tendency, or certain other factors – be screened with MRI in addition to mammograms. (The number of women who fall into this category is small – less than 2 percent of all the women in the United States.) Talk with your doctor about your history and whether you should have additional tests at an earlier age. For more information, please call the American Cancer Society or see our document called *Breast Cancer: Early Detection*.

Lung Cancer

Smoking is the most common cause of lung cancer, but some people who do not smoke can also have lung cancer. Smoking is the cause for more than 80 percent of all lung cancers.

What You Can Do

Lung cancer is one of the few cancers that can often be prevented. If you are a smoker, ask your doctor or nurse to help you quit. If you don't smoke, don't start. If your friends and loved ones are smokers, help them quit. For help quitting, call your American Cancer Society at 1-800-ACS-2345 and ask about Quitline® services.

Colon Cancer

Any adult can have colorectal cancers (cancers of the colon and rectum), but most colon cancers are found in people age 50 or older. People with a personal or family history of this cancer, or who have polyps in their colon or rectum, or those with inflammatory bowel disease are more likely to have colon cancer. Also, eating a diet mostly of high-fat foods (especially from animal sources), being overweight, smoking, and being inactive can make a person more likely to have colon cancer.

What You Can Do

Colon cancer almost always starts with a polyp. Testing can save lives by finding polyps before they become cancerous. If precancerous polyps are removed, colon cancer can be prevented. Eating a low-fat diet that is rich in fruits and vegetables may also make you less likely to have colon cancer.

The American Cancer Society recommends one of the following testing options for all people beginning at age 50:

Tests That Find Polyps and Cancer

- Flexible sigmoidoscopy every 5 years*, or
- Colonoscopy every 10 years, or
- Double contrast barium enema every 5 years*, or
- CT colonography (virtual colonoscopy) every 5 years*

Tests That Primarily Find Cancer

- Yearly fecal occult blood test (gFOBT)**, or
- Yearly fecal immunochemical test (FIT)**, or
- Stool DNA test (sDNA), interval uncertain**

* *If the test is positive, a colonoscopy should be done.*

** *The multiple stool take-home test should be used. One test done by the doctor is not adequate for testing. A colonoscopy should be done if the test is positive.*

The tests that are designed to find both early cancer and polyps are preferred if these tests are available to you and you are willing to have one of these more invasive tests. Talk to your doctor about which test is best for you.

Endometrial Cancer

Endometrial cancer (cancer of the lining of the uterus) occurs most often in women age 50 and older. Taking estrogen without progesterone or taking tamoxifen for breast cancer treatment or to lower the risk of breast cancer might increase a woman's chance for this disease. Having an early onset of menstrual periods, late menopause, a history of infertility, or not having children can increase the risk, too. Women with a personal or family history of hereditary non-polyposis colon cancer (HNPCC) or polycystic ovary disease, or those who are obese are also more likely to have endometrial cancer.

What You Can Do

Watch for signs and symptoms, such as unusual spotting or bleeding not related to menstrual periods, and report these to your doctor. Although the Pap test is very good at finding cancer of the cervix, it is not a test for endometrial cancer.

The American Cancer Society recommends that yearly testing with an endometrial biopsy be offered by age 35 to women who have or are likely to have hereditary non-polyposis colon cancer.

Ovarian Cancer

Ovarian cancer is more likely to occur as women get older. Women who have never had children, who have unexplained infertility, or who had their first child after age 30 may be at increased risk for this cancer. Women who have used estrogen alone as hormone replacement therapy are also at increased risk. Women with a personal or family history of hereditary non-polyposis colon cancer, ovarian cancer, or breast cancer are also more likely to have this disease. However, women who do not have any of these conditions can still have ovarian cancer.

What You Can Do

There are no effective and proven tests today for finding ovarian cancer early (like mammograms for breast cancer). A Pap test does not find ovarian cancer.

There are some tests that might be used in women who have a high chance of having ovarian cancer. You should see a doctor right away if you have persistent symptoms of swelling of the abdomen, digestive problems (including gas, loss of appetite, and bloating), abdominal pain, a feeling like you need to urinate all the time, pelvic pain, back pain, or leg pain. A pelvic exam should be part of a woman's regular health exam.

Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer can affect any woman who is or has been sexually active. It is much more likely to occur in women who have or have had the human papilloma virus (HPV), which is passed on through sex. Cervical cancer is also more likely to occur in women who smoke, have HIV or AIDS, have poor nutrition, and who do not have regular Pap tests.

What You Can Do

A Pap test can find changes in the cervix that can be treated before they become cancer. The Pap test is also very effective in finding cervical cancer early, when it is highly curable. The American Cancer Society recommends the following:

- All women should begin Pap testing about three years after they begin having vaginal intercourse, but no later than age 21. Testing should be done every year with the regular Pap test or every two years using the newer liquid-based Pap test.
- Beginning at age 30, women who have had three normal Pap test results in a row may get tested every two to three years with either type of Pap test. But some doctors may suggest that testing be done more often if a woman has certain conditions, such as HIV or a weak immune system.
- Women over 30 may also get tested every three years with either type of Pap test, *plus* the new HPV DNA test.
- Women 70 years of age or older who have had three or more normal Pap tests in a row and no abnormal Pap test results in the past 10 years may choose to stop having cervical cancer testing.
- Testing after a total hysterectomy (removal of the uterus and cervix) is not necessary unless the surgery was done as a treatment for cervical cancer.

Skin Cancer

Anyone who spends time in the sun can have skin cancer. People with fair skin, especially those with blonde or red hair, are more likely to get skin cancer than people with darker coloring. People who have had a close family member with melanoma and those who had severe sunburns before the age of 18 are more likely to get this type of skin cancer.

What You Can Do

Most skin cancers can be prevented by avoiding the midday sun. When in the sun, wear hats with brims, long-sleeve shirts, and sunglasses, and use sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher on all exposed parts of the skin. If you have children, protect them from the sun and don't let them get sunburned. Be aware of all moles and spots on your skin and report any changes to your doctor right away. Have a skin exam during your regular health checkups.

The Best Defense Against Cancer

Early detection – finding a cancer early before it has spread – gives you the best chance to do something about it. Knowing about these cancers and what you can do can save your life.