

# GYNECOLOGIC CANCERS



In general, we are not as aware of gynecologic concerns as we are other women's health issues. We simply don't talk about "those parts" of our bodies, because maybe it feels too personal, intimate, or embarrassing. However, thousands of women are diagnosed and die from **gynecologic cancers** (cancers that affect a woman's reproductive organs) each year. Talking about our health "below the belt" can help better protect ourselves and the women we care about. **It's time to go public with private concerns!**

## Gynecologic cancer basics:

- **Ovarian cancer:** cancer that affects one or both ovaries or fallopian tubes; the most deadly gynecologic cancer
- **Uterine cancer:** cancer that affects the different tissues of the uterus, especially the endometrial lining; the most commonly diagnosed gynecologic cancer
- **Cervical cancer:** cancer that begins in the cervix; the only true preventable gynecologic cancer
- **Vaginal cancer:** cancer that begins in the vagina; rather rare
- **Vulvar cancer:** cancer that begins in the vulva; rather rare

## Risk factors for gynecologic cancers:

Uncontrollable: Having internal female reproductive organs, age, family history or personal history of gynecologic cancer (also breast and colon cancers), mutations in BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes, reproductive history (infertility, onset of menstrual cycles and menopause), having a disease that affects the immune system (HIV/AIDS)

Controllable: obesity, smoking, HPV, taking estrogen without progesterone

## More about HPV (Human Papillomavirus):

HPV is a common sexually transmitted virus that most people will get. It usually has no symptoms and goes away on its own, but if it doesn't, it can cause cervical, vaginal, vulvar, penile, anal, or back of the throat cancers. New and multiple sexual partners and inconsistent condom use are risk factors for HPV infection. However, even an individual with one lifetime sexual partner can get an HPV infection.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

CDC Inside Knowledge: [cdc.gov/cancer/gynecologic/basic\\_info/](https://cdc.gov/cancer/gynecologic/basic_info/)

Foundation for Women's Cancer: [foundationforwomenscancer.org](https://foundationforwomenscancer.org)

Office on Women's Health: [womenshealth.gov/cancer](https://womenshealth.gov/cancer)

## Protecting yourself:

**Maintain a healthy weight.** Healthy eating and 30 minutes of moderate most days of the week can help prevent obesity.

**Avoid smoking.** Try cutting back or quitting if you do. Limit exposure to second and third-hand smoke.

**Reduce HPV infection risk.** Limit sexual partners, use condoms, and consider HPV vaccination. The HPV vaccine is recommended for boys and girls between ages 9 and 12. However, teens and young adults can still benefit from and receive the vaccine.

**Limit estrogen-only exposure.** Talk to your healthcare provider about how estrogen impacts your cancer risk and what your options or alternatives are for hormone replacement therapy.

**Get screened.** For cervical cancer, a woman can get a pap test and/or HPV test starting at age 21. Speak to your healthcare provider about the options and timing that are right for you.

**Learn the warning signs.** Early detection is important. The most common symptoms of gynecologic cancers are abnormal vaginal bleeding or discharge.



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