



What are Gynecologic Cancers?

Gynecologic cancers are cancers that affect women. They develop in the female reproductive organs (the cervix, uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, vulva, and vagina). Cancers of the cervix, uterus, and ovaries are the most common. The other kinds of cancers—of the fallopian tubes, vulva, and vagina—are very rare. All women may be at risk for these cancers, depending on age, family history, and lifestyle. In this tipsheet, we discuss risks, warning signs, early detection, and prevention for different types of reproductive cancers.

Cervical cancer

Cervical cancer is caused by certain types of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is commonly spread from person to person during sex, and in a small number of cases, it can lead to cervical cancer. Cervical cancer can almost always be prevented by regular Pap test screening. A Pap test can usually find cells that are not normal before they become cancerous.

Who is at risk?

You have a higher risk of cervical cancer if:

- You do not receive regular cervical cancer screening (Pap tests)
- You smoke
- You or your sex partner currently have or have had many sex partners in the past

- You are over age 25
- You have a history of genital warts or HPV (human papillomavirus) infection
- You had sex at an early age

What should you look for?

Most women have no symptoms, but call or e-mail us if you have:

- Abnormal bleeding (sometimes after sex)
- Spotting
- Bloody discharge from the vagina

Uterine cancer

Uterine cancer is the most common reproductive cancer. It begins in the lining of the uterus, called the endometrium, and is also known as endometrial cancer. There is no way to know for sure who will get uterine cancer, but some women have more risk factors than others. Removing the uterus (a hysterectomy) usually cures uterine cancer.

Who is at risk?

You are at higher risk for uterine cancer if:

- You are overweight, have diabetes, or have high blood pressure
- You started your periods at a very young age or went through menopause after age 52
- You have been on unopposed estrogen (estrogen without progesterone)

- You take tamoxifen (a medicine for breast cancer)
- You have a long history of irregular periods
- You are over 50
- You have not had children

What should you look for?

- Unusually heavy or long-lasting menstrual periods
- Bleeding between periods in premenopausal women
- Abnormal vaginal bleeding, spotting, or discharge after menopause

Ovarian cancer

Ovarian cancer is the second most common gynecologic cancer. Like uterine cancer, there is no way to tell which women will get ovarian cancer. Ovarian cysts are not a sign of ovarian cancer; most ovarian cysts are not cancerous. There are a variety of treatments for ovarian cancer, and often more than one is used. Women with a higher risk of ovarian cancer should consider using birth control pills to help protect against ovarian cancer.

Who is at risk?

You have a higher risk of developing ovarian cancer if:

- You have a family history of ovarian cancer*
- You have had breast cancer
- You have not had children
- You are over 50

*Women from families at risk for a rare hereditary ovarian cancer syndrome should consider genetic counseling. Consult your doctor if you have questions.



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What should you look for?

- Abdominal bloating, swelling and/or pain, or a lump
- Pain or pressure in the stomach or pelvic area
- Back pain
- Persistent digestive problems including stomach discomfort, gas, or nausea

Less common gynecologic cancers

Did You Know?

Cancers of the vulva, vagina, and fallopian tubes are not common. They share some of the same risk factors as other types of gynecologic cancers.

Who is at risk?

You have a higher risk of developing these cancers if:

- You have a history of gynecologic cancer, especially cervical cancer
- You have a history of genital warts or HPV (human papillomavirus)
- You are over 50

Things that you can do to protect yourself

Early detection is your best protection.

- Have pelvic exams and a Pap test every 3 years.
- Beginning at age 25, get screened for HPV every 3 years.
- Report any problems, symptoms, or changes you notice to your doctor or health care professional.

Protect yourself from other types of cancers.

- Start routine colorectal cancer screening with a FIT kit (a screening test that you can do from home) at age 50.**
- Have routine mammograms starting at age 40.**

Do not hesitate to ask questions. It could save your life!

What Else Can I Do To Stay Healthy?

- Don't smoke. If you smoke, Kaiser Permanente can help you quit. Visit kp.org/quitsmoking or your local Health Education Center for more information.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Exercise regularly and maintain a healthy weight.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.
- Wear sun screen lotion to prevent skin cancer.
- Do not take estrogen alone if you have a uterus.
- Delay onset of sexual activity.
- Practice safer sex and use condoms.
- Limit the number of sexual partners you have.
- Ask your doctor if you should get the HPV vaccine.

Other resources

Visit kp.org/mydoctor to:

- View most lab results and check your preventive health reminders
- Email your doctor
- Use interactive online tools to help keep you and your family healthy

Contact your facility's Health Education Center or Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

At Kaiser Permanente, we have a wide range of resources with you in mind. The Kaiser Permanente Preventive Care App is now available for download on the Apple App Store, and Google Play for Android.

If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or ndvh.org.

**Women with a personal or family history of breast or colon cancer should consult their doctor or health care professional.

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.