

FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN'S CANCER



Gynecologic Cancer
Awareness • Research • Education



**Learn, Listen, Act
to Maintain Your
Gynecologic Health**

for more information, visit
foundationforwomenscancer.org

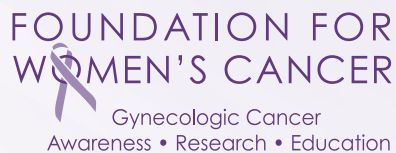
Gynecologic health is important to women of all ages and backgrounds. The Foundation for Women's Cancer was founded in 1991 by physicians — gynecologic oncologists — who have chosen to specialize in the treatment of women with gynecologic cancers. It is our goal to provide you with the information you need to make the best choices to ensure your gynecologic health.



Each year approximately 88,000 women are diagnosed with one of the gynecologic cancers: cervical, ovarian, uterine, vulvar or vaginal. This brochure is designed to help you understand how to minimize your risk of serious health effects from reproductive tract cancers.

In 1999, the Foundation for Women's Cancer declared SEPTEMBER as GYNECOLOGIC CANCER AWARENESS MONTH.

For more information about women's cancer, visit foundationforwomenscancer.org



The Foundation for Women's Cancer is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization under the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

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Introduction

Steady progress has been made to lessen the burden of gynecologic cancers through research. Of particular promise is better understanding of the risks, symptoms and prevention of the three most prevalent gynecologic cancers: cervical, ovarian and uterine.

During September, Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Month, and throughout the year, the Foundation for Women's Cancer urges increased emphasis on helping women understand the steps that can be undertaken to reduce the risks for these cancers and receive the earliest possible diagnosis through symptom recognition.

LEARN, LISTEN, ACT

Cancer is a word used to define a collection of diseases that share one unique characteristic — the uncontrolled growth of cells that have the potential to spread (metastasize) to other parts of the body. Gynecologic cancers grow from a woman's reproductive organ(s) including the cervix, uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, vagina and vulva.

Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer is a cancer that begins in the cervix, the part of the uterus or womb that opens to the vagina. It is the part of the uterus that dilates and opens fully to allow a baby to pass into the birth canal. The normal cervix has two main types of cells: squamous cells that protect the outside of the cervix, and glandular cells that are mostly inside the cervix which make the fluid and mucus commonly seen during ovulation. Cervical cancer is caused by abnormal changes in either of these cell types in the cervix and is the only gynecologic cancer that can be prevented by regular screening and appropriate vaccination.

LEARN

- Cervical cancer is entirely preventable.
- Almost all cervical cancer is caused by a persistent infection with the Human Papillomavirus, or HPV.
- Vaccinating women and young girls before they become sexually active can prevent cervical pre-cancer and cancer.
- Regular Pap tests and HPV testing when recommended are equally important in preventing cervical cancer.
- Cervical cancer usually affects women between ages 30 and 55, but younger women also are at risk.

LISTEN

to your body for these symptoms

- Bleeding after intercourse
- Excessive discharge and abnormal bleeding between periods
- **NOTE:** Most women will have no symptoms making vaccination and regular Pap test plus HPV test, when recommended, key to preventing cervical cancer.
- To learn more about cervical cancer, read our brochure, *Understanding Cervical Cancer: A Woman's Guide*.

ACT

- **Don't smoke!** Smoking weakens the immune system and a weakened immune system can lead to persistent HPV infection.
- **Get vaccinated** before you become sexually active.
- **Get Pap test and HPV tests when recommended** at the intervals recommended by your healthcare provider; **Take the Pledge** to get an annual well woman's exam.
- **If your test results say you have cervical pre-cancer or cancer, seek care from a gynecologic oncologist.**

Ovarian Cancer

Ovarian cancer, the seventh most common cancer among women, usually starts on the surface of the ovary in cells that are called epithelial cells. About 85–90 percent of ovarian cancers are epithelial ovarian cancers. These cancer cells can implant themselves throughout the abdominal cavity. Ovarian cancer, fallopian tube cancer, and primary peritoneal cancer (cancer that originates from the lining of the abdomen called the peritoneum) all have a similar type of growth and similar treatments are used. It is possible to have primary peritoneal cancer even though a woman's ovaries have been removed.

There is growing scientific evidence to support the idea that ovarian cancer may actually begin in the fallopian tubes.

LEARN

- Ovarian cancer is the leading cause of death among the gynecologic cancers and the fifth leading cause of cancer death in women.
- Only 15% of all ovarian cancer cases are detected at the earliest, most curable stage.
- One in 71 women will develop ovarian cancer in her lifetime.
- Learn your individual risk of ovarian cancer.
 - The risk of ovarian cancer increases with age, especially around the time of menopause.

- A family history of ovarian cancer, fallopian tube cancer, primary peritoneal cancer or premenopausal breast cancer, or a personal history of premenopausal breast cancer place women at heightened risk for ovarian cancer.
- Infertility and not bearing children are risk factors; whereas, pregnancy and the use of birth control pills decrease risk.
- **NOTE:** The Pap test only screens for cervical cancer and **DOES NOT** screen for ovarian cancer.
- To learn more about your risk of ovarian cancer, read a brochure developed by the Foundation for Women's Cancer in partnership with Project Hope, *Understanding Your Risk of Ovarian Cancer: A Woman's Guide*.

LISTEN

to your body for these symptoms

- Bloating
- Pelvic or abdominal pain
- Difficulty eating or feeling full quickly
- Urinary symptoms — urgency or frequency
- **NOTE:** Women who have these symptoms almost daily for more than a few weeks should see their doctor, preferably a gynecologist. Prompt medical evaluation may lead to early detection.

ACT

- Unfortunately, there is no general screening test for ovarian cancer.
- **NOTE:** Therefore, women need to understand their risk and listen to their bodies for symptoms.
- **If you have symptoms of ovarian cancer that are frequent, persistent and new to you, ask your doctor to consider ovarian cancer as a possible cause. Most likely you do not have ovarian cancer. But if ovarian cancer is suspected or diagnosed, seek care first from a gynecologic oncologist.**

Uterine Cancer

Most uterine cancers begin in the lining of the uterus (endometrium). The endometrium is the tissue shed each month with the menstrual cycle. In the most common type of uterine cancer, called endometrial adenocarcinoma, cells in the endometrial lining grow out of control, may invade the muscular wall of the uterus and sometimes spread outside of the uterus (ovaries, lymph nodes, abdominal cavity).

Uterine sarcomas represent a type of uterine cancer in which malignant cells form in the muscle of the uterus (leiomyosarcoma) or in the network of support cells in the uterine lining (endometrial stromal sarcomas and carcinosarcomas). Accounting for fewer than five percent of all uterine cancers, uterine sarcomas are much less common than endometrial cancer, but have a much more aggressive clinical behavior. These cancers can spread quickly to distant sites.

LEARN

- The most common uterine cancer is endometrial cancer, and it is the most common gynecologic cancer.
- Uterine cancer usually occurs around the time of menopause, but younger women also are at risk.

- There is no screening test for endometrial cancer.
- **NOTE:** The Pap test only screens for cervical cancer and **DOES NOT** screen for uterine cancer.
- Risk factors for endometrial cancer include:
 - Taking estrogen alone without progesterone
 - Obesity
 - Diabetes
 - Hypertension
 - Use of tamoxifen
 - Late menopause (after age 52)
 - Never becoming pregnant
 - A family history of endometrial or colon cancer
- To learn more about uterine cancer, read our brochure, *Understanding Endometrial Cancer: A Woman's Guide*.

LISTEN

to your body for these symptoms

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding; younger women should note irregular or heavy vaginal bleeding
- Bleeding after menopause. Even brown spotting or a single spot of blood from the vagina is abnormal after menopause and should lead to a prompt gynecologic evaluation.

ACT

- If you experience these symptoms, you should have a biopsy of the endometrium to check for uterine cancer.
- **NOTE:** You can reduce your risk of uterine cancer by taking these steps:
 - Exercise regularly
 - Keep your blood pressure and blood sugar under control
 - Manage your weight
- **If you have an endometrial biopsy that shows endometrial cancer, seek care from a gynecologic oncologist.**

Vaginal Cancer

Vaginal cancer originates in the vagina, usually in the lining (squamous epithelium). It usually is diagnosed in older women.

LEARN

- Vaginal cancer usually affects older women and may not cause symptoms in its earliest stage.
- Risk factors for vaginal cancer include:
 - Infection with HPV (Human Papillomavirus)
 - Smoking
 - Age (60 years and older)
 - A mother who took DES (a hormone medicine used many years ago during pregnancy to prevent miscarriage)
 - Many precancerous conditions and early vaginal cancers can be detected through routine pelvic exams and Pap tests. Because many vaginal cancers are associated with HPV types 16 and 18, vaginal cancer now can be prevented by vaccinations advocated for the prevention of cervical cancer.

LISTEN

to your body for these symptoms

- Bleeding
- Pain
- Problems with urination or bowel movements

ACT

- **Don't smoke!** Smoking weakens the immune system and a weakened immune system can lead to persistent HPV infection.
- **Get vaccinated** before you become sexually active.
- Undergo regular well women exams including a pelvic examination.
- **Get Pap test and HPV tests when recommended** at the intervals recommended by your healthcare provider.
- **If you suspect or have been diagnosed with vaginal pre-cancer or cancer, seek care from a gynecologic oncologist.**

Vulvar Cancer

Vulvar cancer is caused by the growth and spread of abnormal cells within the skin of the labia and perineum.

LEARN

- Infection with HPV (Human Papillomavirus) is a common cause of vulvar cancer in young women.
- Vulvar cancer is typically a disease of older women. Women in their 70's, 80's and 90's should not blame perineal itching only to yeast and other infections.
- Vulvar cancer is very uncommon but usually is a very curable cancer.

LISTEN

to your body for these symptoms

- Itching
- Burning
- Bleeding
- Pain
- New lump or ulcer in the genital area

ACT

- See your doctor, preferably a gynecologist, if you experience these symptoms.
- **If you suspect or have been diagnosed with vulvar cancer, seek care from a gynecologic oncologist.**

We hope that this information is of value to you as you strive to live a balanced life and maintain your gynecologic health.

The Foundation for Women's Cancer is dedicated to expanding public awareness, education, research and training to improve the prevention, early detection and optimal treatment of gynecologic cancers. Our Web site (foundationforwomenscancer.org) offers comprehensive information about gynecologic cancers with content developed by expert

gynecologic oncologist, so you can rely on the information provided.

Research is a top priority. Since awarding its first stimulus research grant to a young investigator in 1995, the Foundation has raised and awarded over \$4,000,000 to promising young clinician-scientists through a highly competitive process.

In addition to mounting national

public education campaigns and outreach, the Foundation is committed to supporting women currently diagnosed with a gynecologic cancer. Each year, we host approximately 10 courses throughout the country for women living with a gynecologic cancer. These free, day-long courses are taught by experts, mostly gynecologic oncologists, who volunteer their time to discuss up-to-date treatment options, breaking research news, quality of life coping mechanisms and a host of special topics.



None of these programs would be possible without the generous support of our donors. Please join our family by making a tax-deductible contribution, large or small, to support our research, educational initiatives and outreach.

A robust library of educational materials can be downloaded from our Web site or ordered using the form in the publications section of the site.

Begun in 2009, the Foundation is proud to host the annual **Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Movement Weekend** in Washington, DC, in November of each year. This event brings together the entire gynecologic cancer community and features courses for survivors and the National Race to End Women's Cancer. This event grows each year and proves that **MOVEMENTS MATTERS!**

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To receive more information about our services or to contribute, please contact us:

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