



After a Cervical Cancer Diagnosis



Cervical cancer is a type of cancer that starts in the cervix, or the lower part of the uterus (womb). The cervix connects the body of the uterus (the upper part where a fetus grows) to the vagina (birth canal). If you have been told you have cervical cancer, you have probably already had a colposcopy (a test to look more closely at the cervix) and a cervical biopsy (a test that takes some tissue to check for cancer). Other tests might have been done on the cancer cells to check for certain proteins and gene changes called biomarkers. You might also have other procedures to find out if the cancer has spread. These tests help your doctor know what type of cervical cancer you have, what stage it is, and what treatment might help.

Treatment for cervical cancer

Your treatment will depend on the type and stage of your cervical cancer. Your treatment options will also depend on the results of the tests on the cancer cells, your health, and your personal preferences.

Surgery is used to treat most cervical cancers. This often involves removing the uterus. Surgery to remove the uterus is called a hysterectomy. A trachelectomy is another type of surgery that allows you to be treated without losing your ability to have children. Other organs might also be removed, such as the ovaries.

Other treatment can include radiation and medicines such as chemo, hormone therapy, targeted drug therapy, or immunotherapy. In many cases, more than one type of treatment is needed. Your doctor will help you decide which treatments are best for you.

Some treatments can cause changes in your menstrual periods. Your periods might stop, even if you have not gone through menopause. These treatments could also affect your ability to get pregnant, but there may be ways to protect this. It's important to talk to your doctor early, before your treatment starts. They can help you understand what to expect.

Be sure to ask:

- What is the goal of treatment?
- What type of cervical cancer do I have?
- What stage is my cervical cancer, and what does that mean?
- What are the biomarker test results?
- What else have you learned from my test results?
- Will I need more tests?
- Will I need surgery? Will my uterus be removed?

What to expect before and during treatment

Your cancer care team will explain your treatment plan. This team may include different doctors, nurses, and other health care workers, depending on the type of treatment you need. For example, if you need surgery, you will work with a surgeon. They will tell you what to expect before, during, and after the procedure. If you need other types of treatment, your cancer care team will explain how it is given, help you get ready for it, keep track of how you're doing, and help you with any side effects. You might also get blood tests, scans, or other tests at certain times to see how well your treatment is working.

Not everyone going through treatment for cervical cancer will have the same side effects. For example, the side effects of having your uterus removed are different from the side effects of chemo, targeted drug therapy, immunotherapy, or radiation treatments. And people getting the same treatment might have different side effects.

Be sure to ask:

- What are my treatment options? What do you think is best for me and why?
- Are there any clinical trials for my type of cancer?
- What side effects might I have, and what can I do about them?
- How will we know if the treatment is working?
- How often will I get treatment? How long will it last?
- Where will I go to get treatment? Can I drive myself?
- Will I be able to keep doing my usual activities, like work and exercise?
- Will I be able to have children after treatment?
- Will treatment affect my sex life? If so, how and for how long? What can I do to help this?

What to expect after treatment

After treatment, ask your cancer doctor for a treatment summary and follow-up plan. This is called a survivorship care plan. Your cancer doctor will work with your family or primary care doctor to help manage side effects from treatment and check your general health. You will have regular tests to check if your cancer has come back, or to check if a new cancer has started in a different part of your body.

For some people, the cancer might not go away completely. They might continue to get treatment, and tests will still be needed to see how well it's working.

You might be faced with changes to your body after treatment. For example, you might have trouble with your bowels or bladder, sexual problems, or skin changes from radiation. You might also have menstrual changes or not be able to get pregnant. Ask your doctor what to expect and let them know if you have any problems.

People who have had cervical cancer are at risk of having it again or getting certain other types of cancer. Even if you feel fine after finishing treatment, it's important to ask your cancer care team about a regular schedule for follow-up tests to check if your cervical cancer has come back.

Be sure to ask:

- Where do I get a copy of my treatment summary and follow-up plan?
- How often do I need to see my cancer care team?
- When and how should I contact them?
- Will I need tests to see if my cancer has come back, or to check for problems from my treatment?
- Do I still need to use birth control after treatment?
- Do I need any screening tests, like a mammogram or colonoscopy, to find other cancers early?
- Are there late or long-term side effects from treatment that I should watch for?
- Where can I find my medical records after treatment?

Staying healthy

Be sure to tell your doctor or cancer care team if any treatment side effects don't go away or if you have any new symptoms.

There are things you can do to keep yourself healthy during and after treatment. Not smoking may help reduce your chances of cervical cancer. Eating well, drinking enough fluids, being active, getting to and staying at a healthy weight, and avoiding alcohol can also help you stay healthy. These things can help lower your risk of getting a new cervical cancer or other cancers.

Dealing with your feelings

Having cervical cancer might make you feel scared, sad, or nervous. It's normal to have these feelings, and there are ways to help you cope with them.

- Don't try to deal with your feelings by yourself. Talk about your feelings, no matter what they are.
- It's OK to feel sad or down once in a while, but let your cancer care team know if you have these feelings for more than a few days.
- If your doctor says it's OK, do things you enjoy like spending time outdoors, going to a movie or sporting event, or going out to dinner.
- Get help with tasks like cooking and cleaning.

You might want to reach out to friends, family, or religious leaders or groups. Counseling can also help. Some people find it helpful to talk with others who've been through the same things. A support group can offer that. Tell your cancer care team how you're feeling. They can help you find the right support.



For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/cervicalcancer or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.