

What is uterine cancer?

Uterine cancer is cancer which occurs in a female's uterus. The uterus is a hollow, pear-shaped organ in the female reproductive system, which is better known as the womb, the place where a foetus grows. The uterus is located in the pelvis between the bladder and rectum. The wall of the uterus has two layers of tissue, an inner lining called the endometrium and an outer layer of muscle tissue termed the myometrium.

There are several types of uterine cancer:

- 1 **Endometrial cancer** – This type of cancer originates in the endometrium, the inner lining of the uterus.
- 2 **Sarcoma of the myometrium** – Cancer that occurs in the smooth muscle of the outer layer of tissue in the uterus.
- 3 **Gestational trophoblastic disease** – The cells that form tumours in this type of uterine cancer originate from the tissue that grows into the placenta during pregnancy.

What are its symptoms?

Uterine cancer usually occurs after menopause but it may also occur around the time when menopause begins.

The most common symptoms of uterine cancer include abnormal bleeding from the vagina, occurring between regular periods or after sexual intercourse, touching or a pelvic exam. Watch out

for bleeding after menopause, especially if it starts as a watery, blood-streaked flow that gradually contains more blood. Other symptoms include an increase in vaginal discharge, pelvic pain during sexual intercourse, and difficult or painful urination.

Infections and sexually transmitted diseases may also lead to similar symptoms. So, while at most times these symptoms are not due to uterine cancer, if you are experiencing any of these symptoms you should schedule an appointment with your doctor to diagnose the problem and have it treated as early as possible.

What are the risk factors associated with uterine cancer?

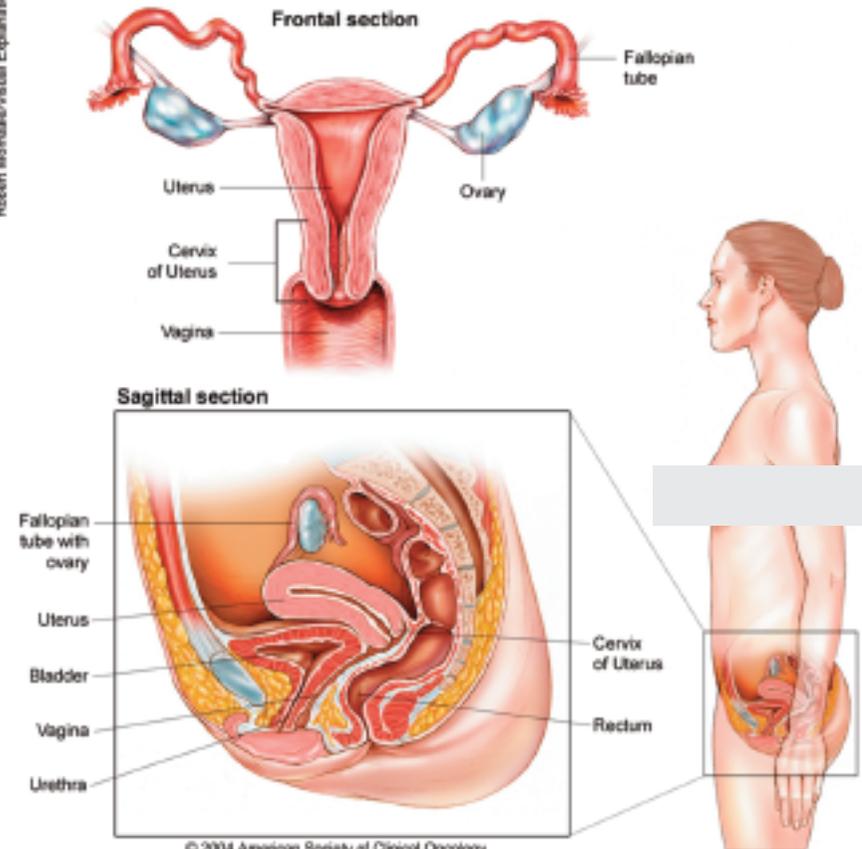
Studies have shown the following risk factors to increase the incidence greatly.

- 1 **Age** – This cancer mostly occurs in women over the age of 50.
- 2 **Family history** – If you have someone in your family who has had the disease or an inherited form of uterine cancer, you are more likely to develop it.
- 3 **Reproductive or menstrual history** – Women who had their first menstrual period before the age of 12, have no children, or experienced menopause after the age of 55 are more likely to develop

uterine cancer.

- 4 **Endometrial hyperplasia** – If you have endometrial hyperplasia, which is the excessive production of cells in the inner lining of the uterus, you are at a higher risk of developing uterine cancer.
- 5 **Hormone replacement therapy** – Those women on hormone replacement therapy

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containing oestrogen without progesterone are at an increased risk.

- 6 **Obesity and related conditions** – Fatty tissues produce oestrogens which increases the risk for this cancer.
- 7 **Tamoxifen** – If you are taking this drug to prevent or treat breast cancer, you have an increased risk of developing uterine cancer.
- 8 **Race** – Asians are less likely to get this disease than Caucasians.

What tests will I have to take to detect it?

Your physician will review your medical history and conduct a pelvic exam. If your doctor suspects some of your symptoms to be associated with uterine cancer, you may be asked to take a Pap test, which examines cells collected from the cervix to see whether they are cancerous or not.

You may also be asked to have a biopsy, where a tissue sample is removed from the uterus to be examined by a pathologist under a microscope. If you have abnormal results, your doctor will ask you to take a transvaginal ultrasound, CT scan, or MRI to get a proper image of the tumour.

What is the treatment for this type of cancer?

Treatment for uterine cancer depends on whether the tumour has invaded the muscle layer or tissue layers of the uterus, whether the cancer has spread to other parts of the body, the grade of the tumour, your age and overall health.

There are many types of treatment options for uterine cancer:

Surgery is the most common option, where the surgeon will remove the uterus, cervix and surrounding tissues, which may include the ovaries, fallopian tubes, lymph nodes and even part of the vagina.

Women who cannot undergo surgery due to other health issues will usually be treated using radiation therapy, which uses high-energy radiation rays to destroy cancer cells. Radiation therapy may also be used if the tumour has breached the layers of the uterus and invaded the outer tissues. Chemotherapy or using anti-cancer drugs to eliminate cancer cells is also an option.

Some women will be recommended to treat uterine cancer using hormonal therapy, using a substance that prevents cancer cells from gaining access or using hormones that they need to grow.

What can I do to prevent uterine cancer?

Make sure you get yearly examination from your physician. Reduce intake of artificial oestrogens for hormone replacement therapy. Implement a healthy diet, low in fats and processed foods. Exercise and maintain a healthy weight. Again, do not forget to talk to your physician if you experience any of the risk factors associated with uterine cancer.

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INFORMATION ON UTERINE CANCER