



# What are Gynecologic Cancers?

Gynecologic cancers are cancers that 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 can be prevented by regular Pap test screening. A Pap test can 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 or your sex partner currently have or have had many sex partners in the past
- you have a history of genital warts or HPV (human papillomavirus) infection
- you smoke
- you began having sex at an early age

### What should you look for?

Most women have no symptoms. Some women may have:

- abnormal bleeding (sometimes after sex)
- spotting
- 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. Removing the uterus (a hysterectomy) usually cures uterine cancer.

### Who is at risk?

You are at higher risk for uterine cancer if you:

- are over 50
- have too much body fat, have diabetes, or high blood pressure
- started menopause after age 52
- take estrogen for menopause
- have not had children
- take tamoxifen (a medicine for breast cancer)

### 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. The majority of ovarian cysts are not cancerous.

### Who is at risk?

You have a higher risk of developing ovarian cancer if you:

- are over 50
- have a family history of ovarian cancer\*
- have had breast cancer
- have not had children
- have used hormone replacement therapy for menopause symptoms for more than 10 years

\*Women from a family suspected of having a rare hereditary ovarian cancer syndrome should consider genetic counseling.

### What should you look for?

- abdominal bloating, swelling and/or pain, or a lump
- unusual vaginal bleeding
- persistent digestive problems including stomach discomfort, gas, or nausea

## Less common gynecologic cancers

Cancers of the vulva, vagina, and fallopian tubes are not common and share some of the same risk factors.



# What are Gynecologic Cancers?

## Who is at risk?

You have a higher risk of developing these cancers if you:

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

## 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 21.
- Have routine mammograms starting at age 40.\*
- Report any problems, symptoms, or changes you notice to your doctor or health care professional.
- 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](http://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.
- Delay onset of sexual activity.
- Practice safer sex and use condoms.
- Limit the number of sexual partners you have.
- Do not take estrogen alone if you have a uterus.
- Ask your doctor if you should get the HPV vaccine.

## Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at [kp.org](http://kp.org) to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to [ndvh.org](http://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.