



# What are Gynecologic Cancers?

Gynecologic cancers (also known as reproductive 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. Risks, warning signs, early detection, and prevention are described below for different types of reproductive cancers.

## Cervical cancer

### *Did You Know?*

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 had 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, or discharge from the vagina

## Uterine cancer

### *Did You Know?*

Uterine cancer begins in the lining of the uterus, called the endometrium. It is the most common reproductive cancer. Removing the uterus in an operation called a hysterectomy can usually cure uterine cancer.

### *Who is at Risk?*

You have more risk for uterine cancer if:

- your age is over 50
- you have too much body fat, have diabetes, or high blood pressure
- your menopause started after age 52
- you are taking estrogen for menopause

- you have not had children
- you take tamoxifen (a medicine for breast cancer)

### *What Should You Look For?*

- unusually heavy or long-lasting menstrual periods
- bleeding in between periods in premenopausal women
- abnormal vaginal bleeding, spotting, or discharge after menopause

## Ovarian cancer

### *Did You Know?*

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:

- your age is over 50
- you have a family history of ovarian cancer\*
- you have had breast cancer
- you have not had children
- you 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.



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## *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

### *Did You Know?*

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

### *Who is at Risk?*

You have a higher risk of developing these cancers if:

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

## What Can I Do To Protect Myself?

*Early detection is your best protection!*

- Have pelvic exams and a Pap test every 1 to 3 years.

- Start routine flexible sigmoidoscopy (a procedure that allows your doctor to examine your rectum and lower colon) exams at age 50.\*
- 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.
- 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

- Connect to our Web site at [kp.org](http://kp.org) to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

\*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.