

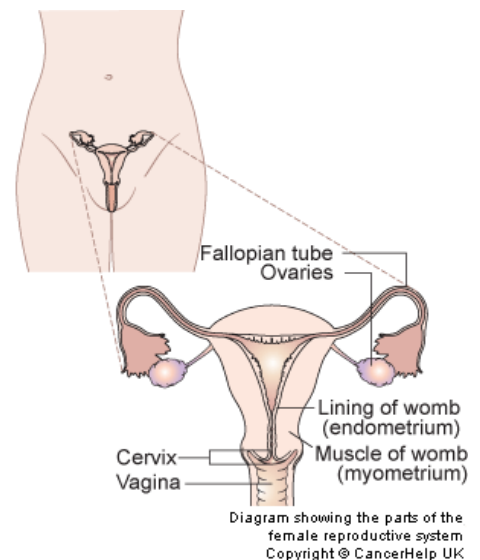
About Womb Cancer - A Quick Guide

Contents

This is a brief summary of the information on 'About womb cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

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- Types of womb cancer
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The womb

The womb is part of a woman's reproductive system. The reproductive system is made up of the vagina, the womb or uterus, the neck of the womb (the cervix), the fallopian tubes and the ovaries. The womb is the pear-shaped muscular bag that protects a growing baby during pregnancy.

Womb cancer can be called by several different names. Doctors often call it uterine cancer because 'uterus' is the medical name for the womb. Or they may call it endometrial cancer. The endometrium is the lining of the womb. Endometrial cancer is the most common type of womb cancer.

If you are looking for information about cancer of the cervix, this is not the right information for you. Although the cervix is part of the womb, cervical cancer is very different from womb cancer. They each have different outlooks and sometimes



different treatments. CancerHelp UK has a separate section about cancer of the cervix.

Womb cancer risks and causes

How common womb cancer is

Womb cancer is the 4th most common cancer in UK women. It is most common among women between the ages of 60 and 79.

Risk factors for womb cancer

We don't know exactly what causes womb cancer. But there are some things that might increase the risk and others that seem to reduce risk. Overweight or obese women are generally more likely to develop womb cancer than women of a normal weight.

Factors related to your menstrual history can increase risk of womb cancer, including starting periods early and having a late menopause.

Having had a baby lowers your risk of womb cancer. If you have more than one child, you lower your risk even further.

Screening for womb cancer

Screening means testing healthy people, with no symptoms, to see if they have a very early form of a disease.

Before screening for any type of cancer can be carried out, doctors must have an accurate test to use. The test must be reliable in picking up cancers that are there. And it must not give false positive results in people who do not have cancer.

At the moment there is no screening test that is accurate and reliable enough to

detect womb cancer in the general population.

Some women from families with a history of certain cancers are known to be at higher risk. These are known as HNPCC or Lynch syndrome families. These women may benefit from regular checks for signs of womb cancer.

Some doctors start giving vaginal ultrasound scans and hysteroscopies to women from these families when they are in their mid 20s to 30s. Other doctors may only investigate when someone has symptoms. There is no single accepted method of screening for womb cancer in these families and doctors are waiting for national guidance.

Womb cancer symptoms

The most common symptom of womb cancer is abnormal bleeding from the vagina – especially in women who have passed through the menopause and stopped having periods. About 9 out of 10 cases of womb cancer are picked up because of post menopausal or irregular vaginal bleeding. This irregular bleeding can be

- Vaginal bleeding after the menopause
- Bleeding that is unusually heavy or happens between periods
- Vaginal discharge – from pink and watery to dark and foul-smelling

Less common symptoms of womb cancer can include pain or discomfort in the lower abdomen, and pain during sex (intercourse). Your doctor may also feel that your womb is enlarged and feels swollen.

Advanced womb cancer can cause more symptoms, especially if the cancer has



spread to other parts of the body. Many of these symptoms are vague and can be difficult to spot. And they are more likely to be caused by much more common conditions than womb cancer.

Types of womb cancer

By far the most common type of cancer of the womb is endometrial cancer. 'Endometrial' means that the cancer starts in the lining of the womb. This lining is called the endometrium. About 95 out of every 100 endometrial cancers are adenocarcinomas. There are 3 main types of adenocarcinomas

- Endometrioid adenocarcinomas
- Papillary serous carcinomas
- Clear cell carcinoma

Less common womb types of womb cancers include adenocanthomas and sarcomas.

Although the cervix is part of the womb, cervical cancer is very different from womb cancer. CancerHelp UK has a large section on cancer of the cervix.

Should I see a womb cancer specialist?

It can be very difficult for GPs to decide who may have a suspected cancer and who has something much less serious. But there are particular symptoms that mean your GP should refer you to a specialist straight away. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) says the following symptoms need an urgent referral to a specialist.

- A lump that the GP can feel in your pelvis, that does not look like fibroids

- Bleeding from the vagina after the menopause in women who are not on hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
- Bleeding from the vagina after the menopause in women that goes on for more than 6 weeks after stopping HRT
- Bleeding from the vagina after the menopause in women taking tamoxifen
- Persistent bleeding in between periods in women who have had a pelvic examination that was normal

If you have symptoms and you do not think your GP is taking them seriously enough, you could print out this page to discuss with them.

What to ask your doctor about womb cancer

- How will I know if I have womb cancer?
- My mother (sister, aunt, grandmother) had womb (breast, ovarian) cancer. Does this affect my cancer risk?
- There is a lot of bowel cancer in my family. Does this affect my risk of womb cancer?
- I have been taking tamoxifen for more than 2 years. Is there a check I can have for womb cancer?
- Is there anything I can do to reduce my risk for womb cancer?
- Should I be screened for womb cancer?
- Can you tell me what sort of womb cancer I have?



Notes

More information

For more information about womb cancer, visit our website

<http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for cancer trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040** 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday

Adapted from Cancer Research UK's Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in September 2011. CancerHelp UK is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through CancerHelp UK and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. © Cancer Research UK 2011. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464) and in Scotland (SC041666).