

Diagnosing Vulval Cancer - A Quick Guide



Contents

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

In this information there are sections on

- Tests for vulval cancer
- Further tests for vulval cancer
- What to ask your doctor

Tests for vulval cancer

Seeing your GP

If you are concerned about vulval cancer or have symptoms, it is usual to begin by seeing your family doctor. Your GP will examine you and ask about your general health and any symptoms you may be having. If your doctor feels that you need some tests, he or she will refer you to a specialist at your local hospital.

At the hospital

When you first see the specialist, they will ask about your medical history and symptoms. The specialist will then arrange for you to have tests if necessary.

Biopsies

Your doctor may want you to have a biopsy. This means removing a sample of the tissue from the affected area of the vulva. The tissue is then looked at under a microscope to see if you have VIN (precancerous changes) or vulval cancer. If you do have vulval cancer, the biopsy will show which type of vulval cancer it is.

You may have an excision biopsy. This is a minor operation that is often done under local anaesthetic. Sometimes the doctor needs to use a general anaesthetic, in which case you might need to stay in hospital overnight.

Another type of biopsy that doctors use is called a punch biopsy. They use an instrument that looks like a tiny apple corer. It removes a small piece of skin. You won't need any stitches afterwards.

Further tests for vulval cancer

If you have been diagnosed with vulval cancer, you will need more tests to see if the cancer has spread. Your specialist needs to know this before deciding on the best treatment for you.



Pelvic examination

Your doctor will want to examine you more closely. This will probably involve using a speculum and colposcope to see inside your vulva and vagina. The speculum opens up your vagina. A colposcope is a specialised magnifying glass that allows the doctor to look for small abnormalities.

Your doctor will ask you to lie with your feet drawn up and your knees apart. You can also have a pelvic examination under anaesthetic. Then the doctor can also check for signs of cancer spread, for example in the bladder or rectum.

Other tests

Your doctor may want to look inside your bladder or your back passage (rectum) for signs of cancer spread. Examination of the bladder is called cystoscopy. Doctors examine the rectum either using a gloved finger, or using an instrument called a proctoscope. You usually have this under general anaesthetic.

Your doctor may also use X-rays, CT scans or MRI scans to see whether the cancer has spread to other parts of your body.

What to ask your doctor about tests for vulval cancer

- What tests are you going to do?
- What are you looking for?
- Will the tests show whether I have cancer?
- Will the tests show whether my cancer can be operated on?

- Are any of the tests painful?
- Do any of the tests have side effects?
- Can I have these tests as an outpatient?
- Should I bring someone with me when I have these tests?
- How long will the results take?
- Who will give me the test results?

More information

For more information about vulval 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 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

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