
Living with Vaginal Cancer - A Quick Guide



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

In this information there are sections on

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Coping with vaginal cancer

It can be very difficult coping with a diagnosis of cancer, both practically and emotionally. You are likely to be feeling very upset and confused. Having cancer in such an intimate place as the vagina may be even harder to cope with.

Cancer of the vagina and its treatment may cause physical changes in your body. These changes can affect the way you feel about yourself. If you are having a sexual relationship, the changes may affect your sex life. We have information about how treatment can affect your sex life.

As well as coping with the fear and anxiety that a diagnosis of vaginal cancer brings, you have to work out how to manage practically. There may be money matters to sort out. Who do you tell that you have cancer? There may be children to consider. The coping with cancer section contains lots of information you may find helpful including information about who can help, counselling, financial issues and much more.

After hysterectomy

If you need to have your womb removed (hysterectomy) for cancer of the vagina, it can be difficult to deal with. Many women feel a great sense of loss or feel less feminine after hysterectomy. If you are young and had wanted to have or complete a family this can be a great loss.

It might help to talk things over with your specialist nurse, a counsellor, or other women who have been through similar experiences. You may find other women who feel as you do through your local cancer support group. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you feel you'd like counselling. You can also find forums to share experiences online.

There is more information about sex and fertility in the coping with cancer section.



Your sex life after vaginal cancer

Early menopause

If you have not yet had your menopause, and you have your womb removed, this can bring on an early menopause. You may be able to take hormone replacement therapy (HRT) to help with some of the symptoms of the menopause.

Vaginal radiotherapy

Radiotherapy for vaginal cancer can also cause an early menopause as well as fibrosis and narrowing of the vagina, vaginal dryness, pain when having sex, and delicate skin inside the vagina. You may be advised to use dilators to stop the vagina shrinking and narrowing. And your doctor might suggest gels and creams to moisturise the vagina and prevent soreness.

Sex after vaginal reconstruction

If you've had the lower part of your vagina removed then you may have a drop in sexual desire or pleasure and problems reaching orgasm. You may also notice numbness in your genital area after this type of surgery. If you have vaginal reconstruction using a thigh flap, you may feel a strange sensation in your inner thighs when you have intercourse.

If you feel nervous about starting your sex life again, try not to worry. Give yourself more time. And talk things over with your partner. Your doctor or specialist nurse can refer you to a sex therapist if you would like.

Living with a colostomy and urostomy

If your vaginal cancer spreads to parts of your bowel or bladder, you may need surgery to remove part or all of these

organs. If you have a cancer of the lower vagina, you may need to have the tube that runs from your bladder to the outside of your body removed (the urethra). You may need to have this done even if your bladder is not affected by the cancer.

After this type of operation, you may need to have permanent bags outside your body that will collect your urine or stools (faeces). Colostomy bags collect your stools and urostomy bags collect your urine. This type of surgery can be quite a shock and will involve some big life changes for you.

There is detailed information about the surgery involved in having a urostomy and having a colostomy in the section about surgery for vaginal cancer.

For information about having a permanent colostomy, see the section about if you need a colostomy in the bowel cancer section.

What to ask your doctor about living with vaginal cancer

- Will I ever get back to normal, or will I have some long-term effects?
- Where can I get help with claiming benefits and grants?
- What practical help is available?
- Why did this happen to me?
- Where can I get help dealing with my feelings?
- Can you refer me for counselling?
- Do I have to pay for counselling?
- How will my sex life be affected?
- Will I still be able to have children?
- How will my bladder and bowels be affected?



- Will I need to have a colostomy or urostomy bag?

Vaginal Cancer Organisations

Cancer Research UK
Main website: www.cancerresearchuk.org
Patient information website:
<http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>
Cancer Information Nurses phone: 020
7061 8355

Gynae C
Phone: 01793 491116
Email: info@gynaec.co.uk
Website: www.gynaec.co.uk

More information

For more information about vaginal 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

Adapted from Cancer Research UK's Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in February 2012. 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 2012. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464) and in Scotland (SC041666).