

# GYNAECOLOGICAL CANCER

The term Gynaecological Cancer refers to all cancers of the female reproductive tract. This includes cancer of the ovary, fallopian tubes, uterus, cervix, vagina and vulva. If you develop a gynaecological cancer, it is very important that the correct specialist treats it. There are medical professionals who are specially trained to treat these cancers. They are called gynaecological oncologists.

Gynaecological cancer can be, and most often is, successfully treated. Early detection is the key to effective treatment of all cancers.

## SYMPTOMS of GYNAECOLOGICAL CANCERS

### Abnormal bleeding

Abnormal bleeding is a very common indication that a woman is having problems with her reproductive system. Any woman who has vaginal bleeding or discharge not related to normal periods and particularly after intercourse or after the menopause, should contact her doctor without delay. Gynaecological cancer will not always be the cause, but abnormal bleeding is a symptom of some gynaecological cancers.

### Abnormal swelling

If a woman is experiencing swelling of the lower abdomen without weight gain elsewhere; if this swelling does not improve with diet and exercise; if there is abdominal pain or if she can feel a lump or mass in her lower abdomen, she should see her family doctor without delay. Gynaecological cancer may not be the cause, but this symptom is common to cancers of the fallopian tube and ovary.

### Pain

Painful urination and pain during intercourse may both be symptoms of cancer of the uterus. Pain in the vulva may be a symptom of cancer of the vulva. If a woman is experiencing any pain in her vulva or lower abdomen, she should report it to her family doctor.

### Itching or Changes in the Vulva

Constant itching in the vulva and changes in the way the vulva looks may be synonymous with cancer of the vulva. If you have vulval itching or if the skin on the vulva looks white, feels rough or develops a lump or ulcer, you should notify your family doctor.

### What Can You Do?

There are several things that a woman can do to help prevent gynaecological cancer and to ensure that it is detected early if it does develop. Reporting symptoms early is vital.

### **Pap Smears**

A pap smear is a test designed to detect changes in the cervix that may lead to cervical cancer. It is important that all women between 18 and 70 years of age who have ever had sex, have a pap smear at least every 2 years.

### **Vulval Self- Examination**

All women over 18 years of age should examine their vulva regularly. A mirror is useful to help you check all parts of your vulva for any bumps, warts, ulcers, or any changes in skin colour. As well as looking, you should feel each part of your vulva for lumps. Most changes and new growths will not be cancerous, however you should report them to your doctor in case treatment is required.

### **Healthy Diet and Exercise**

Although there is no particular diet or exercise routine that will help you stop developing gynaecological cancer, a healthy diet and exercise can help to reduce your chances. Studies show that there is a relationship between obesity and some gynaecological cancers, such as cancers of the ovary, fallopian tubes and uterus.

### **Smoking**

Studies show that smoking increases your risk of developing cancer and pre-cancer of the cervix and vulva as well as a recurrence of the cancer.

*The information provided is selective and does not cover all possible treatment options. It is for our interest only, and is not a substitute for professional care.*

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