

# Cancer of the uterus

## What is the uterus?

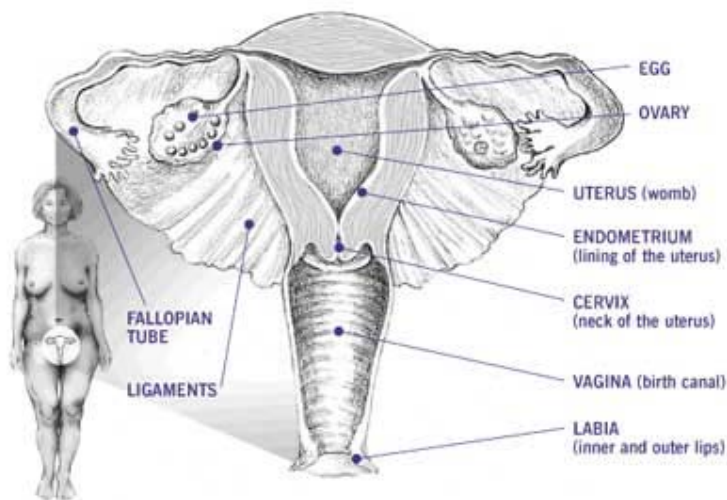
The uterus is part of the female reproductive system. It is also called the womb. The uterus is about the size of your clenched hand. It is joined to the vagina by the cervix, the neck of the uterus.

The lining of the uterus is called the endometrium. The endometrium has several layers of cells, blood vessels, tissue and glands. Each month, the endometrium thickens as it prepares to receive an implanted fertilised egg. If this doesn't happen, once a month the uterus will shed layers of the endometrium through the vagina as a menstrual period.

When a woman experiences menopause, her periods stop and she can no longer have a baby. The uterus becomes smaller and the endometrium thins.

The diagram below shows the uterus, the ovaries, fallopian tubes and vagina.

## THE FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM



## What is cancer of the uterus?

Cancer of the uterus is known by different names, such as: uterine cancer, endometrial cancer, cancer of the womb, and cancer of the lining of the womb. Because the lining of the uterus is called the endometrium, you'll often see cancer of the uterus referred to as 'endometrial cancer'.

Most cancers of the uterus affect the endometrium, but cancer can also develop in the muscle layers of the uterus.

## What causes cancer of the uterus?

We don't know the exact reasons why a woman gets cancer of the uterus, but we can identify some risk factors:

Uterine cancer is more common in women over 50. It is also more common in women who have never had children, in women taking oestrogen hormone replacement without progesterone and in those taking tamoxifen treatment for breast cancer.

High blood pressure, having diabetes, being overweight or having a family history of ovarian, breast, bowel or endometrial cancer can also increase your risk.

Still, many women who get cancer of the uterus have none of these risk characteristics.

Uterine cancer is not caused by sexual activity and it can't be passed on through sex.

**How common is it?**

Forty-five women were diagnosed with cancer of the uterus in Tasmania in 2003.

For more detailed information consult the booklet *Understanding cancer of the uterus* on [www.cancertas.org.au/pages/healthprof\\_patient.php](http://www.cancertas.org.au/pages/healthprof_patient.php)

**Call The Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20**