

cancer cells. After a D&C, your uterus will bleed for a couple of days and you may have some low back and pelvic pain. However, this procedure often reduces or stops any abnormal bleeding you were having.

An ultrasound scan can be used when your doctor cannot perform an endometrial biopsy. If the scan shows that the inner lining of the uterus is a certain thickness, it may be a sign of endometrial cancer. More tests will then need to be performed.

If you have cancer, your doctor may also want you to have some blood tests, a urine test, a CT scan, and x-rays to see if the cancer has spread to other parts of your body.

How is it treated?

If the cancer is diagnosed early, the uterus is usually removed (hysterectomy), along with the ovaries, fallopian tubes (tubes from the ovaries to the uterus), and some lymph nodes.

Other treatment will depend on the type of cancer cells present and the extent of spread. Besides surgery, hormone therapy, radiation therapy, or (rarely) chemotherapy may be used alone or in combination.

How long will the effects last?

With early treatment, more than 80% of women with uterine cancer survive more than 5 years and most are completely cured. The longer the condition goes untreated, the lower the survival rate.

How can I prevent it?

Because the cause of uterine cancer is unknown, there is no way to prevent it. However, the following may help lower your risk:

- ▼ Eat a diet low in animal fat.
- ▼ Control your weight by eating healthy foods and exercising.
- ▼ Control your blood pressure by decreasing stress and eating a diet low in salt.
- ▼ Report abnormal vaginal bleeding promptly to your health care provider.
- ▼ Have an annual pelvic exam and Pap smear.
- ▼ If you are taking estrogen replacement, you should take progesterone with the estrogen and follow your provider's advice for regular exams.

Information contained in this booklet is meant for informational purposes only and should not substitute the visit to your doctor nor his/her advice for your health care.

Accuracy of the content is current to the date of printing.

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Endometrial Cancer (WOMB CANCER)



DR. RAYMOND MANSOOR

B Sc , MB BS , DM (OG, UWI), FACOG
OBSTETRICIAN & GYNAECOLOGIST

TANNER STREET & CORN ALLEY
P.O. BOX W1361

ST. JOHN'S, ANTIGUA
TEL/FAX: (268) 463 2232/3

info@mansoormedical.org
www.mansoormedical.org

Cancer of the Uterus (Endometrial Cancer)

What is cancer of the uterus (endometrial cancer)?

Cancer of the uterus is a malignant growth of cells in the endometrium, the lining of the uterus. The uterus (womb) is the muscular organ at the top of the vagina. Babies develop in the uterus, and menstrual blood comes from the uterus. This type of cancer is also called uterine or endometrial cancer.

Uterine cancer is one of the most common cancers among women. It occurs most often in women between the ages of 50 and 70.

How does it occur?

The cause of cancer of the uterus is not known. However, you are at greatest risk of having this type of cancer if you have a condition that causes your body to produce a lot of the hormone estrogen and you have gone through menopause. Having a high level of estrogen in your body does not create a high risk of cancer by itself. It is a risk only when your body also does not have enough of another hormone called progesterone. After you go through menopause, the progesterone in your body decreases or disappears. Usually estrogen levels also drop quite a bit.

Conditions in which you may have a high level of estrogen without enough progesterone are:

- ▼ obesity
- ▼ a history of infertility
- ▼ late menopause
- ▼ polycystic ovary syndrome
- ▼ long-term use of estrogen hormones without the addition of progesterone.

Other factors related to an increased risk of uterine cancer are:

- ▼ radiation treatment of the pelvic area
- ▼ a combination of high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity
- ▼ start of menstrual periods at an early age
- ▼ previous breast or ovarian cancer.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include:

- ▼ vaginal bleeding after menopause
- ▼ bleeding after sexual intercourse
- ▼ bleeding between periods in pre-menopausal women.

Abnormal bleeding is the first symptom in 90% of endometrial cancers. Many women ignore this bleeding or blame it on menopause.

How is it diagnosed?

Rarely uterine cancer is found as a result of a Pap smear. For the Pap smear, your doctor takes a sample of cells from the opening of the uterus (the cervix). The cells are then examined in a lab. A Pap smear may miss cancers that develop higher up in the uterus.

Your doctor will examine the condition and size of your uterus. Your doctor may remove a small sample (biopsy) of your endometrium to be examined under a microscope. The biopsy can usually be done in your provider's office. It causes only a little discomfort. You may have cramps or pain for a short time after the procedure.

You may also have a D&C (dilation and curettage) to remove tissue for examination. This procedure is done under local or general anesthesia. Your cervix is widened (dilated) and a sharp tool called a curette is used to scrape the walls of the uterus. These tissue scrapings are checked for

