

Cervical cancer

This information is about cervical cancer and treatments for cervical cancer.

If you have any questions about this information, ask your doctor or nurse at the hospital where you are having treatment.

You can also call Macmillan Cancer Support on freephone **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. We have interpreters, so you can speak to us in your own language. When you call us, please tell us in English which language you need.

There is more cancer information in your language at macmillan.org.uk/translations

This information is about:

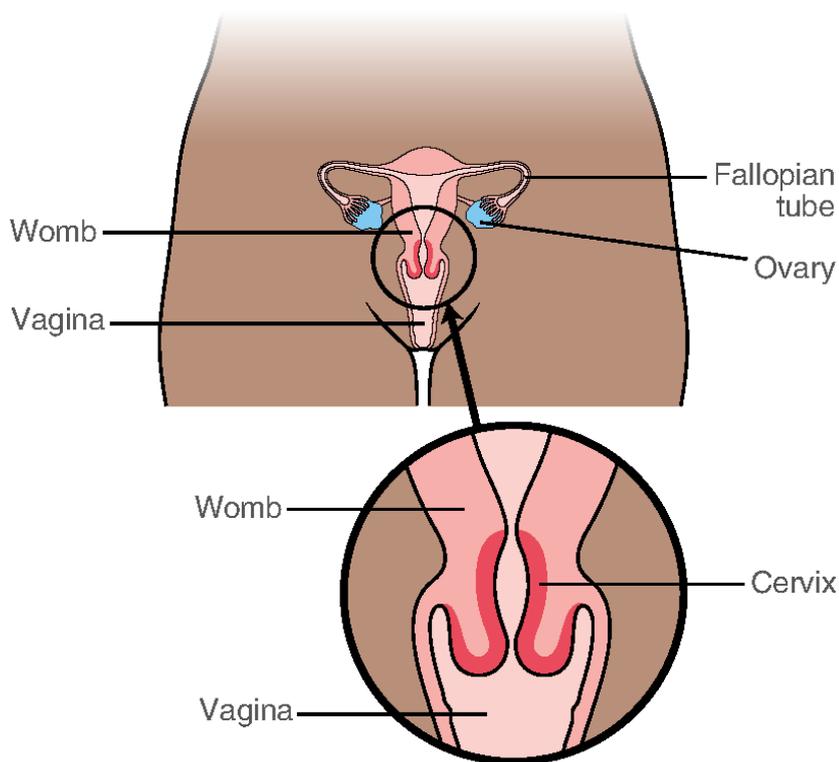
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The cervix

The cervix is the lower part of the womb (uterus) that joins to the top of the vagina. It is the part of the womb that opens (dilates) during childbirth to allow a baby to be born. People who have a cervix include women, transgender (trans) men and people assigned female at birth.

The womb is a muscular organ that is shaped like a pear. The lining of the womb is shed each month when you have your period.

The cervix



About cervical cancer

Cervical cancer develops very slowly from abnormal cell changes in the cervix. These changes do not cause symptoms but may be found when you have a cervical screening test. If a test shows abnormal cell changes, you can have treatment to stop the cancer from developing.

Cervical cancer is not infectious. You cannot catch cancer or pass it on to other people.

Types of cervical cancer

There are two main types of cervical cancer:

- **Squamous cell carcinoma** This is the most common type. It develops from a type of cell that covers the outside of the cervix at the top of the vagina.
- **Adenocarcinoma** This develops from a different type of cell found in the inner part of the cervix.

There are also rarer types of cervical cancer, which may be treated differently.

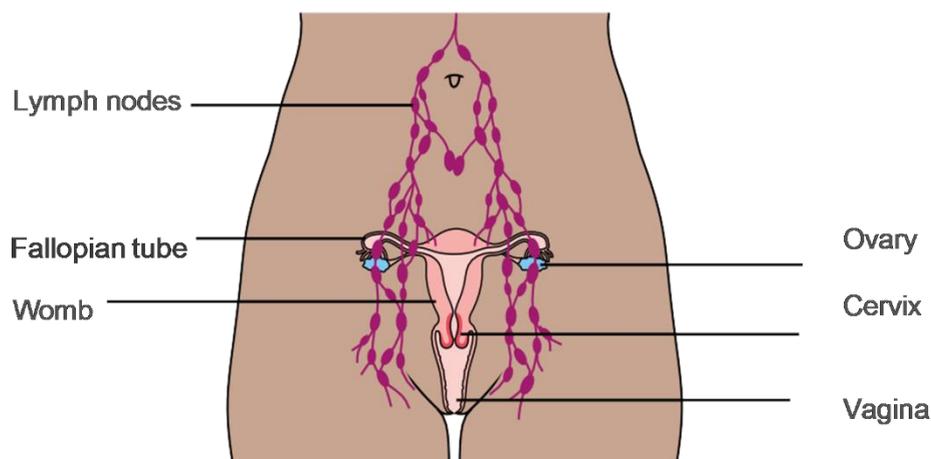
Cervical cancer and lymph nodes

The lymphatic system helps to protect us from infection and disease. It also drains lymph fluid from body tissues before returning it to the blood. The lymphatic system is made up of fine tubes called lymphatic vessels. These connect to groups of lymph nodes throughout the body.

Lymph nodes (or lymph glands) are small and shaped like beans. They filter bacteria (germs) and disease from the lymph fluid. When you have an infection, lymph nodes often swell as they fight the infection.

Sometimes, cancer can spread through the lymphatic system. If cervical cancer spreads in this way, it is most likely to affect the lymph nodes in or above the pelvis.

Pelvic lymph nodes



Risk factors for cervical cancer

Anything that increases the chance of developing a disease is called a risk factor. Having a risk factor does not mean you will get cervical cancer. And not having a risk factor does not mean you will not get it.

HPV

The main risk factor for cervical cancer is the human papillomavirus infection (HPV). There are more than 100 types of this virus. Some types of HPV can affect the

cervix. The types that cause abnormal cell changes in the cervix are called high-risk HPV.

HPV is very common, and most people are infected with it at some point. It can affect all sexual orientations and anyone who is sexually active. This includes people in long-term relationships with one partner. HPV may still affect you even if you have not been sexually active for years.

The NHS offers a vaccine to children aged 11 to 13 to prevent HPV.

A weak immune system

Your immune system helps protect your body from infection and illness. It can be made weaker by:

- smoking
- not eating a healthy, balanced diet
- some conditions, such as HIV.

Smoking

Your risk of getting cervical cancer is higher if you smoke. This may be because:

- smoking makes your immune system less effective at getting rid of HPV
- the chemicals in tobacco can damage your cells.

Contraceptive pill

Taking the contraceptive pill for more than five years may increase your risk of getting cervical cancer. Usually, the benefits of taking the pill are greater than the risks.

Symptoms of cervical cancer

Common symptoms of cervical cancer can include:

- heavier periods than you normally have
- vaginal bleeding between periods
- vaginal bleeding after sex
- vaginal bleeding after the menopause (after you have stopped having periods).

Other symptoms include:

- a smelly vaginal discharge
- urine infections that keep coming back
- pain in the lower tummy or back.

Stages of cervical cancer

The stage of a cancer refers to its size and whether it has spread from where it first started in the body. Knowing the extent of the cancer helps doctors choose the best treatment for you.

There are four main stages of cervical cancer. Each stage then has further sub-divisions. Your doctors may also use the following names to describe the stage of the cancer:

- Early-stage cervical cancer – the cancer cells are only within the cervix
- Locally advanced cervical cancer – the cancer cells have spread outside the cervix and may be affecting surrounding structures such as the vagina, bowel or nearby lymph nodes
- Advanced-stage or metastatic cervical cancer – the cancer has spread to other parts of the body such as liver, lungs or bones.

If the cancer comes back after treatment, this is called recurrent cancer.

Treating cervical cancer

Treatments for cervical cancer include surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy. You may have more than one of these treatments.

The treatment you have depends on:

- the stage of the cancer
- the size of the cancer
- your general health
- whether you have been through the menopause
- whether you want to get pregnant in the future.

You and your doctor will decide on the right treatment plan. Your doctor is an expert in the most effective treatments. But you know most about your own situation and preferences.

Menopause

If you have not been through the menopause, your doctors may try to protect the ovaries. This is so that you do not have the menopause before age 45.

Fertility

Some cervical cancer treatments can affect your fertility. It is important to discuss any concerns you have about your fertility with your healthcare team before treatment starts. They can tell you what options might be available if you would like to get pregnant in the future. You may be able to have treatment that can protect your fertility. If this is not possible, you can talk to a specialist about your options. These may include having egg or embryo storage before treatment.

If your fertility is likely to be affected by treatment, it can be difficult to cope with. Even if you have had a family or did not plan to have children. If you have a partner, it is important to discuss your feelings about this together so that you can support each other.

There are support organisations you can contact to share experiences with other people in a similar situation. You may consider counselling. Your doctor or specialist nurse may be able to arrange this for you.

Talking to your healthcare team

It is important to talk about the treatments you could have with your cancer doctor or nurse. You may also want to talk to a relative or a friend. Sometimes two treatments may work equally well in treating the cancer. You may be asked to decide on the best treatment for you. You will need to think about different things, such as side effects, before you decide. Your doctor or nurse can help you with this.

After talking with you, your doctor will ask you to sign a form to show that you understand and agree to the treatment. This is called a consent form. You will not have any treatment unless you have agreed to it.

It is a good idea to take someone with you who can speak both your language and English. Your hospital can arrange an interpreter for you. If you need an interpreter, it is important to tell your nurse before your appointment.

Questions to ask about your treatment

- What does my diagnosis mean?
- What is the stage and grade of the cancer?
- What treatments are available?
- What are the benefits, risks and side effects of each treatment?
- How will the treatment affect my daily life?
- Who can I talk to about how I am feeling?

Surgery

Most cancers of the cervix are diagnosed at an early stage. Surgery is the main treatment for early stage cervical cancer. The surgeon will remove the cancer and a margin of healthy tissue around it. Depending on the type of operation you have, they may also remove other tissue.

After the operation, the surgeon will send all the tissue to a laboratory to be looked at under a microscope. There are different types of surgery to remove cervical cancer.

Large Loop Excision of Transformational Zone (LLETZ)

LLETZ is a common way to remove abnormal cells from the cervix. This operation is often used to treat the earliest stage of cervical cancer and may be the only treatment you will need. It is sometimes called loop electrosurgical excision procedure (LEEP).

You may have this:

- to help diagnose cervical cancer
- to treat cervical cancer.

After you have had some local anaesthetic to numb the cervix the doctor uses a loop shaped tool to remove the cells. You may feel some pressure but it should not be painful.

You may find this type of treatment upsetting or embarrassing. Your healthcare team will try to help. Let them know how you are feeling and tell them if you have any questions or worries. If you want to bring someone with you for support during the treatment, this can usually be arranged.

Needle excision of the transformation zone (NETZ)

NETZ) is similar to a LLETZ. The main difference is that the thin wire used to cut away the affected area is straight, instead of in a loop.

Cone biopsy

A cone biopsy is a small operation to remove a cone shaped area of the cervix. This operation may be used to diagnose cervical cancer or treat early stage cervical cancer.

Hysterectomy

A hysterectomy is an operation to remove the womb. It is the standard treatment for early-stage cervical cancer. If you have been through the menopause, the surgeon will usually also remove the fallopian tubes and ovaries. Sometimes the surgeon needs to remove the ovaries if you have not had the menopause. This means your periods will stop straight away and you will have the menopause.

After a hysterectomy, you will not be able to get pregnant. Being told that your cancer treatment means you cannot get pregnant can be very difficult.

If you are told you need to have a hysterectomy, you can ask your hospital doctor to refer you to a fertility specialist before your surgery. They can explain fertility options to you. If you are interested in surrogacy (someone else carrying a child in their womb for you), you may want to store eggs or embryos (fertilised eggs).

Trachelectomy

This operation is a type of fertility-sparing surgery. If you have early-stage cervical cancer, it may be an option if you want to get pregnant in the future.

The surgeon removes the cervix and the upper part of the vagina. They usually also remove the supporting tissues around the cervix. This is called a radical trachelectomy. You may also have some pelvic lymph nodes removed. It may be done a few days before, or at the same time as, the trachelectomy.

The womb is left in place so that it is possible for you to get pregnant in the future. The surgeon usually puts a stitch at the bottom of the womb after removing the cervix. This helps to keep the womb closed during pregnancy.

After a trachelectomy, there is a higher chance of miscarrying during pregnancy. If you become pregnant, you will be referred to a local specialist maternity service for closer monitoring. The baby will need to be delivered by caesarean section. Your surgeon can explain more about this.

A trachelectomy is very specialised surgery and is not done in all cancer hospitals. If it is an option for you, you may need to be referred to another hospital. There, you can discuss the benefits and possible risks with a surgeon who specialises in this operation.

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy treats cancer by using high-energy x-rays. These destroy the cancer cells while doing as little harm as possible to normal cells. You may have radiotherapy:

- if you have early or locally advanced cervical cancer
- after surgery, if there is a high risk of the cancer coming back
- if cancer comes back in the pelvis after surgery
- to help relieve symptoms such as bleeding.

Radiotherapy for cervical cancer may be given:

- externally, from a machine outside the body
- internally, from radioactive material that is temporarily put into the part of the body being treated – doctors call this brachytherapy.

You may have both external and internal radiotherapy. The doctor who plans your treatment will discuss this with you.

Side effects of radiotherapy

- The skin in the treated area may become red or darker, if you have dark skin.
- You may need to pass urine more often or urgently.
- You may get diarrhoea.
- You may get narrowing or dryness in the vagina
- Radiotherapy to the pelvis may cause an early menopause

Your radiotherapy team will explain what to expect. Always tell them if you have side effects during or after radiotherapy. They can give advice and support to help you cope.

Chemoradiation

Radiotherapy for cervical cancer is often given with chemotherapy. This is called chemoradiation. The chemotherapy drugs make the cancer cells more sensitive to radiotherapy. The combination of treatments can be more effective than having radiotherapy on its own.

The side effects of chemoradiation are similar to radiotherapy side effects. But they can be more severe. Your doctor, radiographer or specialist nurse can give you more information about chemoradiation and the possible side effects of treatment.

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy uses anti-cancer (cytotoxic) drugs to destroy cancer cells. These drugs disrupt the way cancer cells grow and divide, but they also affect normal cells.

You may have chemotherapy:

- with radiotherapy as your main treatment – this is called chemoradiation
- after surgery and with radiotherapy (chemoradiation),
- if there is a high risk of the cancer coming back
- if the cancer comes back after treatment
- if the cancer spreads to other parts of your body.

Side effects

Chemotherapy may cause side effects. Many of these can be controlled with medicines, and usually go away when treatment finishes. Your doctor or nurse will tell you more about what to expect. Always tell them about any side effects you have, as there are usually ways they can help

Targeted therapy

Bevacizumab (Avastin®) is a targeted therapy treatment sometimes used to treat cervical cancer. It may be used if cervical cancer:

- is advanced
- has come back after treatment.

It cannot cure the cancer, but it may help to control it for a time. Bevacizumab works by stopping the cancer from making blood vessels. This means that the cancer does not get the oxygen and nutrients it needs and may shrink or stop growing.

The treatment is usually given in combination with chemotherapy drugs. Bevacizumab is given into a vein as an infusion.

Side effects are usually mild to moderate. They can include:

- high blood pressure
- headaches
- feeling sick
- a sore mouth
- tiredness (fatigue)
- diarrhoea.

Your doctor or nurse can tell you more about possible side effects and how they can be managed.

Side effects of cervical cancer treatment

Treatments for cervical cancer may cause an early menopause and can also affect your sex life.

Menopause

If you have not been through the menopause, and the ovaries are removed or affected by radiotherapy, you will have an early menopause. This can cause menopausal symptoms such as:

- hot flushes
- night sweats
- joint and muscle pain
- effects on mood (for example, low mood).

These symptoms are caused by a low oestrogen level. An early menopause can also increase your risk of bone thinning and heart disease. Your doctor or specialist nurse can talk with you about what can help with menopausal symptoms. They can also explain what you can do to help protect your bone health and heart health

Sex after treatment

Cervical cancer, its treatments and their side effects may affect your sex life and how you feel about yourself. This often slowly improves after treatment, although for some people it may take longer.

It is common to feel nervous about sex after cancer treatment, but it is completely safe for both you and your partner. At first it may be easier to take more time to help you relax and for your partner to be very gentle.

Tell your doctor or nurse if you are having problems with your sex life. They may be able to offer help and support.

Many people find it difficult to talk about sexual difficulties because they feel embarrassed or self-conscious. Your doctor or nurse will be used to talking about these issues. But if you feel uncomfortable talking to your doctor or nurse, you can call our cancer support specialists on **0800 808 00 00**.

After your treatment

After your treatment has finished, you will have regular check-ups with your cancer doctor or nurse. These may include:

- a phone appointment
- a physical examination

- blood tests
- x-rays
- scans.

You can talk to your doctor or nurse about any problems or worries at these check-ups. Contact your doctor or nurse for advice if you notice new symptoms or have problems between appointments.

Well-being and recovery

Living a healthy lifestyle can help your body recover after treatment. It can also help to reduce the risk of other illnesses, such as heart disease, diabetes and strokes.

After cancer treatment, you may choose to make some positive lifestyle changes. You may have already followed a healthy lifestyle before cancer. But you may be more focused on making the most of your health.

Your feelings

You may feel overwhelmed when you are told you have cancer. You may have many different emotions. There is no right or wrong way to feel. There are many ways to cope with this. Talking to a close friend or relative may help. Your doctor or nurse can help too.

Getting the right care and support for you

If you have cancer and do not speak English, you may be worried that this will affect your cancer treatment and care. But your healthcare team should offer you care, support and information that meets your needs.

We know that sometimes people may face extra challenges in getting the right support. For example, if you work or have a family it can be hard to find time to go to hospital appointments. You might also have worries about money and transport costs. All of this can be stressful and hard to cope with.

But help is available. Our free support line **0808 808 00 00** can offer advice, in your language, about your situation. You can speak to nurses, financial guides, welfare rights advisers and work support advisers.

We also offer Macmillan Grants to people with cancer. These are one-off payments that can be used for things like hospital parking, travel costs, childcare or heating bills.

How Macmillan can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we are here to support you.

Macmillan Support Line

We have interpreters, so you can speak to us in your language. Just tell us, in English, the language you want to use. We can help with medical questions, give you information about financial support, or be there to listen if you need someone to talk to. The free, confidential phone line is open 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Web chat

You can send us a web chat message saying you would like an interpreter. Tell us, in English, the language you need, and we will arrange for someone to contact you. Click on the 'Chat to us' button, which appears on pages across the website. Or go to **macmillan.org.uk/talktous**

Macmillan website

Our website has lots of information in English about cancer. There is also more information in other languages at **macmillan.org.uk/translations**

We can also arrange translations just for you. Email us at **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk** to tell us what you need.

Information centres

Our information and support centres are based in hospitals, libraries and mobile centres. Visit one to get the information you need and speak with someone face to face. Find your nearest centre at **macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Local support groups

At a support group, you can talk to other people affected by cancer. Find out about support groups in your area at **macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Macmillan Online Community

You can also talk to other people affected by cancer online at **macmillan.org.uk/community** You can access it at any time of day or night. You can share your experiences, ask questions, or just read through people's posts.

More information in your language

We have information in your language about these topics:

| | |
|---|---|
| Types of cancer <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breast cancer• Large bowel cancer• Lung cancer• Prostate cancer Treatments <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chemotherapy• Radiotherapy• Surgery | Coping with cancer <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cancer and coronavirus• Claiming benefits when you have cancer• Eating problems and cancer• End of life• Healthy eating• Help with costs when you have cancer• If you're diagnosed with cancer – A quick guide• Side effects of cancer treatment• Tiredness (fatigue) and cancer• What you can do to help yourself |
|---|---|

To see this information, go to [macmillan.org.uk/translations](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/translations)

References and thanks

This information has been written and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been translated into your language by a translation company.

The information included is based on the Macmillan booklet **Understanding cervical cancer**. We can send you a copy, but the full booklet is in English.

This information has been reviewed by relevant experts and approved by our Chief Medical Editor, Professor Nick Reed, Consultant Clinical Oncologist.

With thanks to: Dr Rosie Harrand, Consultant Clinical Oncologist; Miss Eva Myriokefalitaki, Consultant Gynaecological Oncology Surgeon; Mr Raj Naik, Consultant Gynaecological Oncologist; Claire Parkinson, Macmillan Gynaecology Nurse Specialist; and Dr Alexandra Taylor, Consultant Clinical Oncologist.

Thanks also to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this information.

All our information is based on the best evidence available. For more information about the sources we use, contact cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk

MAC19428_E1_English

Content reviewed: 2021

Next planned review: 2024

We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate but it should not be relied upon to reflect the current state of medical research, which is constantly changing. If you are concerned about your health, you should consult your doctor. Macmillan cannot accept liability for any loss or damage resulting from any inaccuracy in this information or third-party information such as information on websites to which we link.

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| Content reviewed: 2022 |
| Next planned review: 2025 |