



# After a Cervical Cancer Diagnosis

If you have been told you have cervical cancer, you have probably already had a colposcopy (a test to look more closely at the cervix) and a cervical biopsy (a test that takes some tissue to check for cancer). Other tests might have been done on the cancer cells to check for certain protein and gene changes. You might also have scans or other procedures to find out if the cancer has spread. These tests help your doctor know what type of cervical cancer you have, what stage it is, and what treatment might help.

There are many ways to treat cervical cancer, including surgery, radiation, and medicines such as chemo, targeted drug therapy, or immunotherapy. Many times, more than one type of treatment is needed. Treatment mostly depends on the type and stage of your cervical cancer. Your treatment choices also depend on the results of the tests on the cancer cells, health problems you might have, your age, whether you want to have children, and your personal choices.

It's important to know that some treatments can make it hard for you to have children. By talking about this early, before your treatment starts, your doctor can help you decide which treatments are best for you and what can be done to protect your ability to have children.

## Be sure to ask:

- What type of cervical cancer do I have?
- What stage is my cervical cancer, and what does that mean?
- What else have you learned about my cervical cancer from my test results?
- Will I need more tests?

- What treatments do you think are best for my cervical cancer?
- What are the likely side effects from treatment?
- Will the treatment affect my chances of having children? Is there anything that can help with this?

## What to expect during treatment

Your cancer care team will explain your treatment plan to you. This team may include different doctors, nurses, and other health care workers depending on the type of treatment you need. For example, if you need a procedure to help protect your ability to have children, certain specialists will help you understand what to expect. Or, if you need radiation therapy, you will work with your radiation oncologist to know what to expect before, during, and after radiation. If you need other types of treatment, your doctor or cancer care team will explain how it is given, help you get ready for it, keep track of how you are doing, and help you with any side effects. You might also get blood tests, x-rays, or scans at certain times during your treatment to see how well your treatment is working.

Not everyone going through treatment for cervical cancer will have the same side effects. For example, the side effects of surgery are different from the side effects of chemo, targeted drug therapy, immunotherapy, or radiation treatments. And people getting the same treatment might have different side effects. It's also important to know if you need to use birth control during treatment.

### Be sure to ask:

- What are my treatment options? What do you think is best for me and why?
- What is the goal of treatment?
- What side effects might I have, and what can I do about them?
- How will we know if the treatment is working?
- How often will I get treatment, and how long will it last?
- Where will I go to get treatment? Can I drive myself?
- Will I be able to keep doing my usual activities, like work, exercise, and having sex?
- Do I need to use birth control during treatment?

### What to expect after treatment

After treatment, your cancer care team will help you deal with any side effects you might still have. You will also have regular tests to check if your cancer has come back, or to check if a new cancer has started in a different part of your body.

For some people, the cancer might not go away completely. They might continue to get treatment, and tests will still be needed to see how well it's working.

Be sure to tell your doctor or someone on the cancer care team if you have side effects that don't go away after treatment or any new symptoms.

You might also have a hard time coping with changes to your body after treatment. For example, you might have trouble with your bowel or bladder, sexual problems, or skin changes from radiation. If this is a concern, talk to your cancer care team about what options are available to help you cope.

You might also have menstrual changes, not be able to get pregnant, or have scars from surgery. Talk to your cancer care team about when you might be able to try to get pregnant. If you have had a procedure to help keep your fertility, talk with your cancer care team about the need for using birth control and getting help with family planning.

Even if you've finished treatment and may feel fine, it is important to ask your cancer care team about a regular schedule of follow-up tests to check if cervical cancer has come back.

### Be sure to ask:

- How often do I need to see my cancer care team?
- Do I need a follow-up plan after treatment?
- Will I need tests to see if the cancer has come back or to check for problems from my treatment?
- Do I need to use birth control after treatment?
- How and when will I know if I can still have children after my treatment is done?
- Do I need any screening tests, like a mammogram or colonoscopy, to find other common cancers early?
- Are there late or long-term side effects from treatment I should watch for?
- When and how should I contact my cancer care team?
- Where can I find my medical records after treatment?

### Staying healthy

There are things you can do to keep yourself healthy during and after treatment for cervical cancer. Eating well, being active, getting to and staying at a healthy weight, not smoking, and avoiding alcohol can help you. Some of these things might also help lower your risk of getting a new cervical cancer or other cancers.

Remember to get screened for other kinds of cancers and continue getting checked for other health problems. Talk to your doctor about the screening and testing plan that's right for you.

## Dealing with feelings

Having cervical cancer might make you feel scared, sad, or nervous. You might also have a hard time coping with changes to your ability to have children and changes in your body after treatment. It is normal to have these feelings, and there are ways to help you cope with them.

- Don't try to deal with your feelings by yourself. Talk about your feelings, no matter what they are
- It's OK to feel sad or down once in a while, but let your cancer care team know if you have these feelings for more than a few days.

- Do things you enjoy, like going to a movie, going out to dinner, or spending time outdoors, if your doctor says it's OK
- Get help with tasks like cooking and cleaning

You might want to reach out to friends and family or to religious leaders or groups. Some people find it helpful to talk with others who've been through the same things. A support group can offer that. Others might be helped by getting counseling. Tell your cancer care team how you are feeling. They can help you find the right support.

For cancer information, day-to-day help, and support,  
call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** or  
visit us online at **[cancer.org/cervicalcancer](https://cancer.org/cervicalcancer)**. We're here when you need us.



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No. 080817-Rev. 8/22

