

Cancer of the uterus

If cancer of the uterus is found and treated early, you have a good chance of getting better.

What is the uterus?

The uterus (also called the womb) is the place in a woman's body where a baby grows.

The uterus is made up of mostly muscle with an inner lining called the endometrium.

What is cancer of the uterus?

This type of cancer can also be called uterine cancer, womb cancer or endometrial cancer.

The cancer can develop from abnormal cells in the lining of the uterus (endometrium) or the muscle tissue.

Most cancers of the uterus (about 8 in 10) begin in the lining of the uterus. These are called endometrial cancers. The rare types of uterine cancer that begin in the muscle of the uterus include:

- endometrial stromal sarcoma
- leiomyosarcoma
- undifferentiated sarcoma.

How will I know I have uterine cancer?

You can have cancer of the uterus without noticing anything is wrong. The most common warning sign is unusual bleeding from the vagina.

Common tests used to find cancer of the uterus include an ultrasound of the uterus and ovaries (transvaginal ultrasound) and a biopsy using an instrument called a hysteroscopy, which allows the doctor to see inside your uterus and to take a small tissue sample.

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What do the test results mean?

The test results will tell the doctor what type of cancer of the uterus you have, and if the cancer has spread (the stage). This information helps the doctors decide what treatment you need.

Stage 1 – the cancer is found only in the uterus

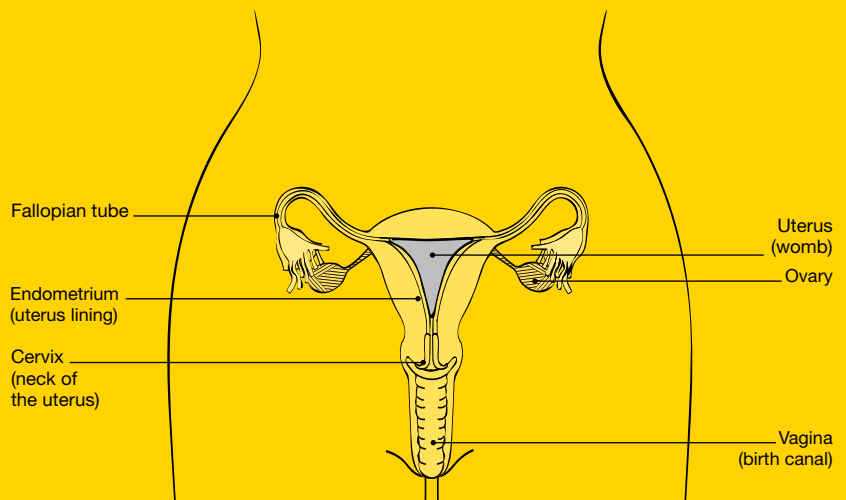
Stage 2 – the cancer has spread from the uterus to the cervix

Stage 3 – the cancer has spread beyond the uterus/cervix to the ovaries, fallopian tubes, vagina or nearby lymph nodes

Stage 4 – the cancer has spread to the inside of the bladder or rectum, or to other parts of the body

A woman's reproductive system

The picture below shows a woman's reproductive system – the part of the body that helps make a baby. The uterus is part of the reproductive system.



Fallopian tubes

Thin tubes that go from the uterus to the ovaries.

Uterus

Also called the womb. This is where a baby grows.

Cervix

Also called the neck of the uterus. It connects the lower part of the uterus to the vagina.

Vagina

Also called the birth canal. It connects the uterus to the outside of the body.

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What treatment will I need?

There are different treatments for cancer of the uterus. You may have one or more of these treatments.

- **Surgery** – this is the most common treatment. There are two types of operations:
 - **Hysterectomy** – removes the uterus (womb) and cervix
 - **Bilateral salpingo oophorectomy** – removes the uterus, cervix, fallopian tubes and both ovaries
- **Radiotherapy** – uses x-rays to kill or damage the cancer cells if they have spread to the pelvis
- **Hormone treatments** – injections or tablets that slow hormone growth in the body, which can make the cancer grow
- **Chemotherapy** – uses drugs to kill or damage the cancer cells

How will the treatment affect my body?

Treatment for cancer of the uterus can cause problems. Some of the common ones include:

- **Feeling tired** – this can last for months
- **Menopause** – periods stop and you can't have a baby
- **Lymphoedema** – swelling of part of the body, like the leg

How do I manage my cancer?

It is normal for you and your family to have lots of different feelings right now. Talking with your doctor, nurse or health care professional will help answer any questions you may have.

Depending on where you live, you might need to travel for treatment. You can get help to pay for travel and accommodation.

For more information

- Call Cancer Council 13 11 20
- Visit www.cancerCouncil.com.au
- Visit www.menzies.edu.au/cancer
- For current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cancer-related statistics, see www.aihw.gov.au

This information has been adapted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by Menzies School of Health Research in consultation with a Clinical Advisory Group and an Indigenous Consultation group. Production by Cancer Council.