

Learn about **CERVICAL CANCER**

What is the cervix?

The cervix is a part of the body that connects the lower part of the uterus to the vagina.

What is cervical cancer?

Most cervical cancer is cancer that begins in the cells of the cervix. If healthy cells change and grow out of control, they form a tumor (mass) that can either be benign or cancerous. A benign tumor will not spread, but a cancerous tumor can spread to other parts of the body (metastasize).

What are the 2 main types of cervical cancer?

Squamous cell carcinoma starts in the squamous cells on the outer part of the cervix, an area which can be seen by the doctor during a speculum exam. A speculum exam is also part of the general pelvic exam. Most cervical cancer cases are squamous cell carcinoma—up to 9 out of every 10 cases (80–90%).

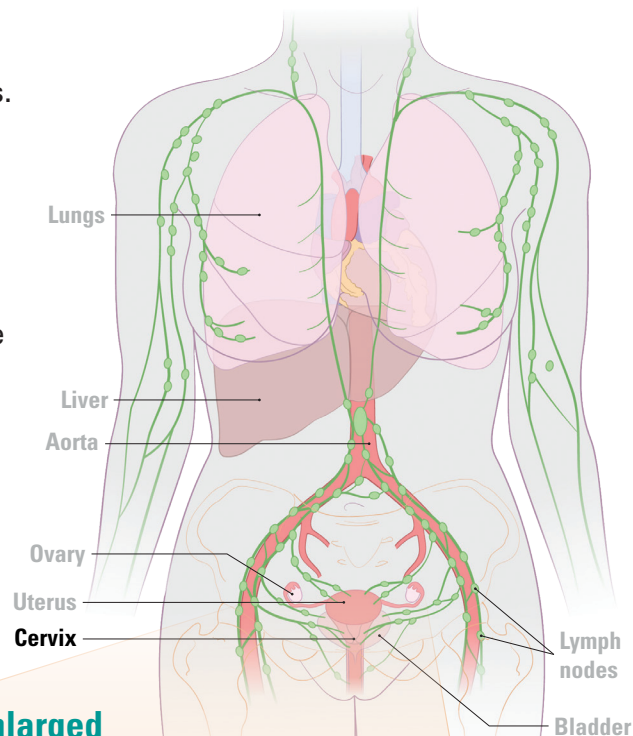
Adenocarcinoma starts in the glandular cells in the inner part of the cervix that connects to the uterus. Of all cervical cancer cases, adenocarcinoma makes up about 1 to 2 out of every 10 cases (10–20%).

Your doctors will assign a cancer stage

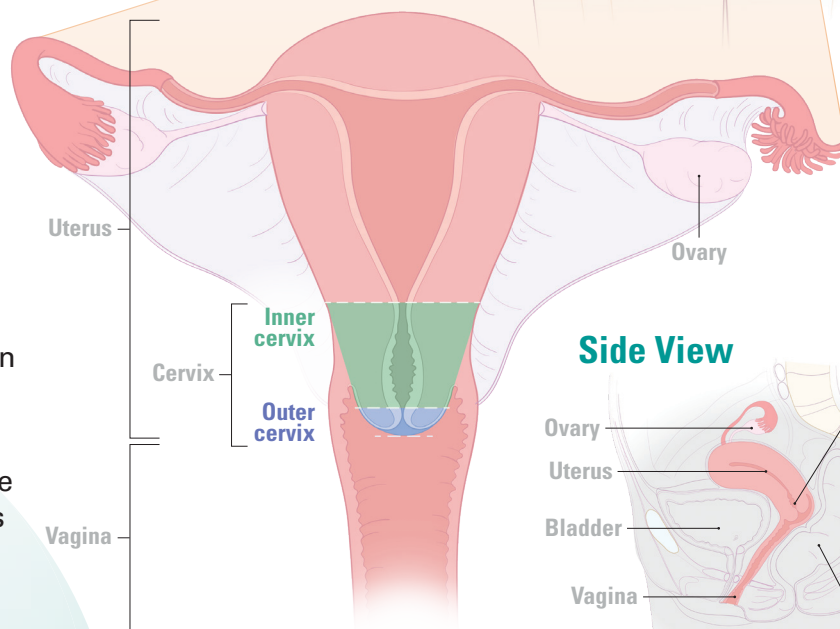
Staging is the process doctors use to find out where the cancer is located, if it has spread, and how far it has spread. To assign the cancer a stage, doctors use tests such as a physical exam, imaging scans, and a biopsy (tissue sample taken to view under a microscope).

There are 4 stages of cervical cancer. The lower the number, the smaller the tumor size or the less the cancer has spread. Stage 4 is a more advanced cancer.

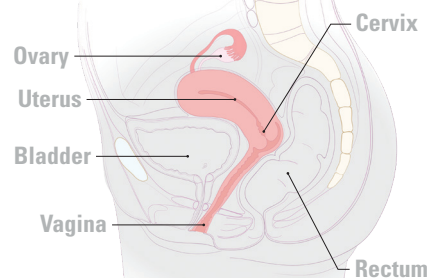
Front View



Enlarged



Side View



You and your health care team will create a treatment plan

Once doctors assign a cancer stage, you and your health care team can create a treatment plan. The best treatment for you depends on many factors such as cancer stage, tumor type, and your medical history. Your team may recommend more than one type of treatment.

Common treatments for cervical cancer include:

Surgery to remove the tumor and some healthy tissue around it. A gynecologic oncologist will determine if surgery may be the right treatment. A gynecologic oncologist is a doctor who specializes in cancers of the cervix, uterus, and ovaries.

Radiation therapy, which uses high-energy x-rays to kill the cancer cells. A radiation oncologist may plan it before surgery or instead of surgery. They can use radiation therapy to treat cancer that has spread to other organs and tissues. A radiation oncologist is a doctor who specializes in planning radiation therapy.

Systemic therapy, which uses medicine to kill cancer cells throughout the body. Doctors can give it through a needle in a vein or in a pill or capsule to be swallowed. Gynecologic oncologists or medical oncologists are doctors who specialize in treating patients with chemotherapy and other systemic therapies.

A treatment plan may also include treatment for side effects. Other members of your health care team may include advanced practice providers (such as nurse practitioners and physician assistants), oncology nurses, social workers, pharmacists, counselors, and nutritionists.

Questions to consider asking your health care team

- What is the stage of my cancer and what does that mean?
- What treatment do you recommend and why?
- Can I continue to work during treatment? Can I drive myself to treatment?
- What are the possible short-term and long-term side effects of treatment?
- Will my sex life change after treatment? If so, who should I talk to for help?
- Will my treatment impact my ability to have children in the future?
- Are there certain foods I should eat or avoid eating?
- If I start to feel overwhelmed, depressed, or distressed, who should I talk to?
- What type of follow-up will I need after treatment?

Coping with cervical cancer

Every woman's cancer, treatment, and experience is unique. It's common to feel anxious about getting treatment — treatment can sometimes cause side effects and body changes that may affect how you feel. Talk with your cancer care team regularly about how you are feeling and let them know about any side effects or new body changes. They can help you manage and relieve side effects.

After a cancer diagnosis, patients also sometimes have changes in their emotions and connections with others. Programs and support services can be helpful.

Helpful websites to learn more about cervical cancer

Merck is providing the websites set forth below for informational purposes only. The inclusion of Patient Organization websites does not constitute an endorsement by the Patient Organizations of Merck or any Merck products.

National Cervical Cancer Coalition ► nccc-online.org

Cervivor ► cervivor.org

Foundation for Women's Cancer ► foundationforwomenscancer.org

American Cancer Society ► cancer.org

CancerCare ► cancercare.org

Cancer.com ► cancer.com

Cancer Support Center ► cancersupportcommunity.org

Livestrong ► livestrong.org

