

Uterine Cancer Awareness



Uterine Cancer, one of the most common cancers of the female reproductive system, occurs when cells grow abnormally and uncontrollably in the uterus, a hollow, pear-shaped organ where a fetus develops during pregnancy. According to the World Cancer Research Fund International, in 2020, The Bahamas had the highest rate of Uterine Cancer in the world and the world's highest rate of Uterine Cancer mortality, ahead of the Caribbean countries of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Worldwide, Uterine Cancer is the sixth most prevalent cancer affecting women, according to the World Cancer Research Fund International, and rates are rising among women of all racial and ethnic groups.

What are the types of Uterine Cancer?

There are two main types of Uterine Cancer: endometrial cancer and uterine sarcoma. Endometrial cancer, which develops in the lining of the uterus, is the most common type of Uterine Cancer, comprising 95% of all cases. In contrast, uterine sarcoma is much rarer, accounting for 5% of all cases, and forms in the myometrium, the muscle wall of the uterus.

What are the symptoms of Uterine Cancer?

While the symptoms of Uterine Cancer are similar to those of other disorders affecting the female reproductive system, you should contact a doctor if you experience the following:

- Any bleeding that occurs after menopause
- Abnormally heavy periods, vaginal bleeding before periods, and prolonged periods pre-menopause
- unexplained weight loss

- abdominal pain
- difficulty urinating
- a change of bowel habits
- a water discharge, which may have a pungent odor

What increases a woman's risks for developing Uterine Cancer?

As researchers further study the causes of Uterine Cancer, they have identified an increased level of estrogen, caused by various conditions, as being a significant risk factor for the disease, which primarily affects women over 50. Conditions that expose the uterus to elevated levels of estrogen include ovarian tumors, obesity, and diabetes, but studies show that if your period starts before the age of 12 or if menopause occurs after 50, your uterus has prolonged exposure to estrogen, increasing your risk. By undergoing estrogen replacement therapy, receiving radiation therapy to the pelvis, and taking tamoxifen to treat breast cancer, you can also increase your risk for Uterine Cancer, and some studies show that those who have never been pregnant are more likely to become diagnosed with the disease than those who have.

What tests are used to diagnose Uterine Cancer?

After meeting with a patient who has the symptoms of Uterine Cancer, healthcare providers confirm a diagnosis by performing the following tests:

- a physical exam, most usually involving checking the uterus for swelling after separating the walls of the vagina by inserting two fingers or using a speculum.
- a pelvic, abdominal, or transvaginal ultrasound - A pelvic and abdominal ultrasound requires a full bladder, while a transvaginal ultrasound, which involves inserting a special probe into the vagina, does not require a full bladder.
- An endometrial biopsy, during which a doctor uses a pipelle or hysteroscope to extract cells from the uterus for examination under a microscope.

How is Uterine Cancer treated?

In many cases, surgery is the only required treatment for Uterine Cancer, as women often detect it before it spreads to other tissues and organs. A total hysterectomy, which entails removing the uterus and cervix, is the most common surgical treatment for Uterine Cancer. Since the ovaries produce estrogen, the hormone that fuels the growth of Uterine Cancer, many women choose to undergo a bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy, in which a surgeon removes the fallopian tubes, ovaries, uterus, and cervix. Following a total hysterectomy, a woman will not be able to become pregnant, and if the ovaries are also removed, menopause will begin. In addition to surgery, some women, depending on their overall health and the nature of the cancer, may also receive radiation therapy, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, or targeted cell therapy.

Can Uterine Cancer be prevented?

Although there is no known way to completely prevent Uterine Cancer, there are steps you can take to reduce your risk, such as maintaining a healthy weight and consuming a nutritious diet rich in fruits and vegetables, and studies show that some women can also lower their risk by taking progesterone-based or combined estrogen and progesterone contraceptives.

What is the Cancer Society doing to help?

This month, we are raising awareness of Uterine Cancer, a little-understood disease, through our newsletters and social media posts. During our Monthly General Meeting, the general public heard advice from a health professional on reducing their risk and detecting the disease in its early stages, when it's easier to treat.

As Family Islanders undergo cancer treatment in Nassau, they can, free of charge, stay at the Cancer Society of The Bahamas' Cancer Caring Centre, a home away from home with comfortable, spacious rooms and a well-stocked kitchen. At our Adult Cancer Support Group meetings, professional clinicians, such as doctors and nurses, advise older cancer patients and lead discussions aimed at helping them cope with the emotional turmoil stemming from their diagnosis.

For further information on our services, visit our website, www.cancersocietybahamas.org, or call us at (242) 323-4441 or (242) 32304482. You can also send an email to admin@cancersocietybahamas.org.

