



ENDOMETRIAL CANCER

Q. WHAT IS CANCER OF THE ENDOMETRIUM AND WHAT ARE ITS SYMPTOMS?

A. Cancer of the endometrium, a common kind of cancer in women, is a disease in which cancer (malignant) cells are found in the lining of the uterus (endometrium). The uterus is the hollow, pear-shaped organ where a baby grows during a woman's pregnancy. Cancer of the endometrium is different from cancer of the muscle of the uterus (called sarcoma of the uterus). You should see a doctor if you have any of the following problems: bleeding or discharge not related to menstruation, difficult or painful urination, pain during intercourse, or pain in the pelvic areas.

Q. WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR ENDOMETRIAL CANCER?

A. One risk factor for endometrial cancer is an increase in the number of normal cells lining the uterus (endometrial hyperplasia). Since incidence of endometrial cancer may be related to hormonal changes, any condition that elevates hormone levels may put women at increased risk. Estrogen replacement therapy without the addition of a progestin, some ovarian tumors, obesity, having had few or no children, and late menopause are all associated with elevated hormone levels.

Q. HOW IS ENDOMETRIAL CANCER DIAGNOSED?

A. Your doctor may use several tests to see if you have cancer, usually beginning with an internal (pelvic) examination. During the examination, your doctor will feel for any lumps or changes in the shape of the uterus. Your doctor will then do a Pap test, using a piece of cotton, a brush, or a small wooden stick to gently scrape the outside of the cervix (opening of the uterus) and vagina to pick up cells for microscopic study.

Because cancer of the endometrium begins inside the uterus, it does not usually show up on a Pap test. For this reason, your doctor may also do an endometrial biopsy. If an endometrial biopsy can be performed, another diagnostic test will be required such as a transvaginal ultrasound. This tissue is then checked for cancer cells.

Q. WHAT IS THE MOST COMMON TREATMENT FOR ENDOMETRIAL CANCER?

A. Surgery is the most common treatment for cancer of the endometrium. Total abdominal hysterectomy and bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy, both of which involve removing the uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries through a cut in the abdomen. Lymph nodes in the pelvis are also removed (lymph node dissection).

The lymph nodes are small, bean-shaped structures found throughout the body that produce and store infection-fighting cells, but may also contain cancer cells. Following surgery, the pathology report determines the exact stage and grade of the cancer. Your specific treatment is dependent on the stage of the cancer.

Note: See also the article entitled "Cancer of the Uterus"

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