Article Series Cervical

Cervical Cancer Treatment & Clinical Trials

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Cervical cancer occurs when cells in the cervix grow out of control. Fortunately, it is preventable and highly treatable if found early. Keep reading to learn about different ways to treat cervical cancer.

How Do I Know If I Have Cervical Cancer?

At first, cervical cancer may not cause any symptoms. But as it grows, you might notice:

- Unusual vaginal bleeding, like between periods or after sex or menopause
- Pain during sex

- Discomfort in the lower belly

If you have these symptoms, your doctor may do tests to check for cervical cancer, including:

- **HPV or Pap test:** looks for changes in cervical cells
- **Colposcopy:** uses a magnifying instrument to check for abnormalities in the cervix
- **Biopsy:** removes a small tissue sample from the cervix to look for cancer

Cervical Cancer Treatment

There are several treatment options available for cervical cancer. Your doctor will work with you to create a treatment plan, which includes:

- Information about your cancer
- Treatment options and goals
- Possible side effects
- Length of treatment

Surgery

Surgery is an operation that can be used to remove cancer. Different types of surgery include:

- **Freezing (cryosurgery) or laser treatment (laser ablation):** kills abnormal cells in the cervix
- **Hysterectomy:** removes the uterus, cervix, and sometimes surrounding structures
- **Lymph node removal:** removes lymph nodes (small structures in the immune system that filter substances in the body) that help cancer spread

Radiation

Radiation therapy uses powerful x-rays to kill cancer cells. It can be used alone or with other treatments, like chemotherapy.

There are two main types:

- **External radiation therapy:** a machine outside the body sends radiation to the cancer
- **Internal radiation therapy (brachytherapy):** a small radioactive device is placed directly inside or near the cancer

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy uses specialized drugs to stop cancer from growing. It works by killing the cancer cells directly or stopping them from dividing.

Chemotherapy can come as a pill or injection. It can be given alone or combined with other treatments.

Targeted therapy

Targeted therapy drugs attack proteins that control how cancer cells grow, spread, or live longer.

Different types of targeted therapy work by:

- Helping chemotherapy attach to cancer cells
- Stopping cancer cells from making abnormal proteins that fuel cancer cell growth
- Blocking abnormal proteins that help cancer cells grow

Immunotherapy

Immunotherapy drugs train your immune system to recognize and fight cancer cells.

One type of immunotherapy, called immune checkpoint inhibitors, helps your body fight cancer by blocking “checkpoint” proteins that cancer cells use to hide from the immune system. This may make it easier for the immune system to attack these cancer cells.

Clinical Trials

Researchers use clinical trials to check the safety and effectiveness of new treatments and to find ways to improve current treatments. If you have cervical cancer, you may be able to enroll in a trial. Talk to your doctor to see if a clinical trial

is right for you.

Cervical cancer treatments have come a long way, and there are many options to help you fight the disease. Talk to your doctor to find the best plan for you.