

# Cervical Cancer: Treatment Choices



Cervical cancer can be treated. Treatment can be used to cure or control the cancer and keep it from spreading. It can also help ease symptoms or problems the cancer is causing. Surgery and radiation are the most common treatments for cervical cancer.

You may be treated by a specialist called a gynecologic oncologist. This is a doctor who is specially trained to treat cancers of the female reproductive system. They will talk with you about the treatment options that are best for you.

The treatment plan that's best for you will depend on things like:

- Type of cervical cancer you have
- Size of the tumor and where it is (the stage of the cancer)
- Your age
- Your overall health
- If the cancer has spread to other parts of your body
- If you want to become pregnant in the future
- Your personal concerns and preferences

## Questions and concerns

You may have questions and concerns about your treatment options. You may want to know:

- How you'll feel and look
- How your body will work after treatment
- If you'll have to change your normal activities
- How treatment will affect your sex life

Your healthcare provider is the best person to answer your questions. They can explain what your treatment choices are, how well they're expected to work, what their risks and side effects may be, and how much they'd likely cost.

Your provider may advise a certain treatment. Or they may offer more than one, and ask you to make the choice. It can be hard to make this decision. It's important to take the time you need to make the right decision for you.

Deciding on a plan may take some time. Talk with your provider about how much time you can take to think through your options. You may also want to get a second opinion before deciding on your treatment plan. It may also help you to involve your partner or spouse, family, or friends in this process.

## Types of treatment

There are two main types of cancer treatments:

- **Local treatments.** These treatments remove, destroy, or control cancer cells in a certain place in the body. Surgery and radiation are local treatments.

- **Systemic treatments.** These treatments destroy or control cancer cells throughout the body. Chemotherapy and targeted therapy are systemic treatments.

You may have just one type of treatment. Or, you may have a combination of treatments. It's more common to have a combination of treatments.

## Local treatments for cervical cancer

Local treatments for cervical cancer include:

- **Surgery.** The goal of surgery is to take out all the cervical cancer. Nearby pelvic lymph nodes might be taken out and tested to see if cancer has spread to them. There are several types of surgery used to treat cervical cancer. Your healthcare team can tell you more about the specific surgery you may need. Surgery is commonly used for early stage cancer that hasn't spread beyond the cervix. In these cases, surgery often cures the cancer.
- **Radiation.** This treatment kills cancer cells by using high-energy X-rays aimed right at the tumor. With external beam radiation, a large machine sends radiation beams into your body. With internal radiation (brachytherapy), a radioactive material is put inside your body. Most of the time, radiation is used along with chemotherapy. Sometimes, however, both types of radiation are used together and without chemotherapy.

## Systemic treatments for cervical cancer

Systemic treatments for cervical cancer include:

- **Chemotherapy (chemo).** This treatment uses strong medicines that kill cancer cells. The medicines travel through your blood around your whole body to kill cancer cells in the cervix, as well as any that may have spread beyond the cervix. Chemo doesn't work very well for cervical cancer when used by itself. Most women who get chemo for cervical cancer also have radiation. This is called chemoradiation. The chemo helps the radiation work better.
- **Targeted therapy.** This treatment uses medicines that target certain parts of cancer cells. This allows them to attack and kill cancer cells while limiting the amount of harm done to healthy cells. Targeted therapy is often given along with chemo. It might be used for cervical cancer that has spread to other parts of the body or come back after prior treatment.
- **Immunotherapy (biologic therapy).** This treatment uses medicines that help your immune system find and kill cancer cells. It might be used for cervical cancer that has spread or come back after prior treatment.

## Clinical trials for new treatments

Researchers are always looking for new ways to treat cervical cancer. These new methods are tested in clinical trials. Taking part in a clinical trial may help you get a newer type of treatment that could offer better results. Before starting treatment, talk with your provider to find out if there are any clinical trials you should think about.

## Talking with your healthcare provider

Your gynecologic oncologist will help you make a treatment plan. At first, thinking about your treatment options may seem overwhelming. But making treatment decisions will be one of the most important meetings you'll have with your provider.

It may take time to choose the right plan. Ask your provider how much time you can take to explore your options. Learn as much as you can. Make a list of questions, and don't be afraid to ask them. Consider the benefits and possible side effects of each option. You may want to get a second opinion from another healthcare provider before deciding on treatment. You may also want to talk with your family and friends.

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