

BUSY WOMEN SMART SOLUTIONS
BALANCING LIVES

SimplyHer

"I was duped into buying fake gems on holiday"

YOUR 2016 LOOK YOUNGER GUIDE

Makeup tricks,
age-defying skincare,
hair colour that
takes the years off

CLEAN HOME HEROES

The most
powerful vacuums
+ readers' favourite
cleaning brands



8 Bad Work Habits To Ditch Now

MAY WAN
No helper? No sweat, she says



**The
Surprising
Reason
Women
Like Sex
So Much**

P.56 MOBILE APPS TO
LIVE A BETTER LIFE



P.112 YUMMY
GOURMET SALADS



Tried & Tested

- Brow pencils
- Two-wheeled boards
- Juice programmes
- Action camera
- Combi ovens



It's the fourth most common cancer among women and kills about 100 women in Singapore every year, but cervical cancer is, in fact, highly treatable and preventable.

BY AILEEN LALOR

9 Things You Must Know About Cervical Cancer

1 60 TO 70 YEARS OLD

"The most common age at which women in Singapore are diagnosed with cervical cancer is between 60 and 70. Those at risk include smokers, those who've never had a Pap smear, who start having sexual intercourse at an early age and who've had multiple sexual partners or have partners with multiple partners," says Dr Joseph Ng, senior consultant, Division of Gynaecologic-Oncology, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, National University Hospital.

2 HPV CAUSES CERVICAL CANCER

The human papillomavirus (HPV) can cause normal cells on the surface of the cervix to convert to precancerous lesions before they become a tumour, which can take 10 years or more, says Dr Joseph. Going for regular cervical cancer screening, such as a Pap smear, can help your doctor detect any precancerous

changes, allowing you to seek treatment and prevent cervical cancer.

3 IF YOU SEE BLOOD...

Bleeding after sex or between periods, or having blood in your vaginal discharge, is one of the signs of cervical cancer. However, obstetrician and gynaecologist Dr Christopher Ng of Gynae MD Women's & Rejuvenation Clinic says many women who have cervical cancer don't show any symptoms or may have non-specific complaints like fatigue, loss of appetite, weight loss, heavy periods or back pain.

4 REGULAR PAP SMEARS FROM 25

"Pap smears are recommended to screen for and detect abnormal cervical cell changes and early signs of cervical cancer," says Dr Christopher. Start screenings at age 25 or within three years of becoming sexually active, he adds.

Our experts



DR JOSEPH NG, senior consultant, Division of Gynaecologic-Oncology, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, National University Hospital



DR CHRISTOPHER NG, obstetrician and gynaecologist, Gynae MD Women's & Rejuvenation Clinic

Most women stop getting Pap smears at 69, if the test shows a negative result, and if they have had two other consecutive negative tests within the last 10 years.

5 A NEW TEST CAN HELP

A new test to detect cancer-causing HPV DNA is now available for patients who show a slight abnormality in their Pap smear. Recommended for high-risk patients, it tests for types of HPV that are most likely to cause cervical cancer by examining pieces of their DNA in cervical cells. While it can be done in combination with a Pap smear, the HPV test does not replace a Pap test.

6 TEST EVERY THREE YEARS

Going for tests at least once in three years will provide sufficient protection while avoiding over-testing, says Dr Joseph.

7 POSITIVE ISN'T ALWAYS BAD NEWS

Pap smears are not infallible. Dr Joseph says that between 60 and 80 per cent of women with a positive Pap smear will be negative for cancer or precancer, where cancer cells are only on the surface layer of the cervix.

There is also a possibility of false negatives. Dr Christopher says this happens at a rate of between 20 and 40 per cent, which is why regular testing is so important. If there is an abnormality, you will be referred for a colposcopy to determine if there is any precancerous or cancerous change; a biopsy will be performed to confirm the diagnosis.

8 TREAT IT RIGHT

Surgery is the first treatment option for early-stage cancers. This can range from cryotherapy, a quick procedure in

which abnormal cells are frozen away, to hysterectomy or radical hysterectomy where the pelvic lymph nodes are removed. With late-stage cancer, chemoradiation may be recommended. "This is a treatment where a small weekly dose of chemotherapy is given to improve the overall response of the tumour to radiation therapy," says Dr Joseph.

9 FOR YOUNGER PATIENTS

If you have cervical cancer while in your childbearing years, doctors will typically recommend options that preserve your fertility, although the priority will always be to deal with the cancer. Chemotherapy and radiation can damage your eggs, so women who wish to have children can freeze their eggs before the treatment, which allows them the option of going for in vitro fertilisation post-treatment.

"I had cervical cancer at 35"

Christina, a mum of two who lives in the United Kingdom, was diagnosed after a routine Pap smear.

"I've been going for regular Pap smears and have always had the all-clear, so I wasn't worried when I saw my doctor for a routine test in March 2015. It was just another item on my long list of things to do while the children, Joe, five, and Rowan, two, were away at school and nursery."

"A week later, I received news that I had severely abnormal cells, and while it was unlikely to be cancer, I would need a colposcopy. The news left me shell-shocked."

"But I reassured myself that my friends who had precancerous cells were all fine after treatment; I led a healthy lifestyle and had none of the risk factors."

"Before my colposcopy, the doctor explained that there were abnormalities in the glandular cells of my cervix. Cancer in the glandular cells is called adenocarcinoma, which is less common, more aggressive and progresses faster than squamous cell cancer. He said that if the cells were precancerous, a hysterectomy was the best course of action – that's when it struck me that things were more serious than I had imagined."

"When my husband Daniel and I went to see the consultant a few weeks later, he

wasted no time in telling us I had cancer. I was so shocked that nothing he said after that registered."

"The doctor confirmed that I had stage IB adenocarcinoma and my only option was a radical hysterectomy. This meant removing the lymph nodes, cervix, top part of the vagina, uterus and fallopian tubes, even my ovaries, if necessary."

"To check if the cancer had spread to my other organs, I underwent an MRI before the surgery; thank goodness, it hadn't. As for how far the cancer had spread within my cervix and whether I would need chemotherapy, that could only be determined post-surgery."

"For a month post-op, I had to have blood-thinning injections. I wore compression stockings and couldn't lift anything heavier than a half-full kettle for eight weeks, which meant I couldn't pick up my kids."

"But about 10 days after the operation, doctors gave me the all-clear, saying they managed to remove all the cancerous cells and I wouldn't need chemo. I remember asking them repeatedly: 'Are you sure? Are these the right results?'

"I feel very lucky to have detected cervical cancer at a routine Pap smear; I hope other women can set aside their embarrassment or fear of discomfort and get tested, as ignoring this potentially life-saving screening can kill them." **SH**

ALL ABOUT THE HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV)

1 There are more than 170 types of HPV, 40 of which are transmitted through sex. About 20 are high risk, meaning they can cause cancer.

2 HPV can cause cancers of the vulva, vagina, penis and anus, as well as cervical cancer.

3 You can vaccinate against HPV. There are currently two vaccines that protect against HPV types 16 and 18, which are responsible for at least 70 per cent of cervical cancers. They are effective if delivered before you have had sex, which can expose you to the virus.

4 Females aged nine to 26 can get vaccinated at polyclinics. Medisave can be used to cover the vaccination, which costs from \$90 a shot; a full course is two to three shots.

5 Older women can also benefit. "Women up to the age of 45 have been shown to benefit from HPV vaccination, although to a lower degree than those under 26 who have never had sex," says Dr Joseph.

6 Boys and men need vaccination too. Dr Joseph explains: "This is because a significant number of penile and anal cancers are HPV-related. More importantly, the larger the number of people, regardless of gender, who are vaccinated against HPV, the greater the degree of protection against cervical cancer in the overall population."