



September is Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Month

Gynecologic oncology is a specialized field of medicine that focuses on cancers of the female reproductive system, including ovarian cancer, uterine cancer, vaginal cancer, cervical cancer, and vulvar cancer.

The Indian context:

- 🦋 Gynecologic cancer is the fourth most common type of cancer in women, affecting approximately 1 in 20 women.
- 🦋 Cervical cancer, mainly caused by Human Papillomavirus infection, is the leading cancer in Indian women and the second most common cancer in women worldwide.
- 🦋 India has a population of approximately 365.71 million women above 15 years of age, who are at risk of developing cervical cancer.
- 🦋 The age adjusted incidence of cervix cancer in urban India is 15-20 new cases per 1,00,000 women per year.
- 🦋 The incidence of cervix cancer is 1.5 to 2 times higher in rural women. Cancer of cervix is decreasing in urban women at the rate of 18per cent per decade.
- 🦋 Ovarian cancer incidence has remained stable in the past few decades.

Gynecologic Cancers

Cervical, Endometrial, and Ovarian

Cervical cancer: The cancer is caused by several types of a virus called human papillomaviruses (HPV). HPV spreads through sexual contact. Most women's bodies are able to fight this infection. But sometimes the virus leads to cancer. You're at higher risk of cervical cancer if you smoke, have many children, have many sex partners, use birth control pills for a long time, or have HIV infection.

Endometrial cancer: Although the exact cause of endometrial cancer is unknown, increased levels of estrogen appear to have a role. Estrogen helps stimulate the buildup of the lining of the uterus.

Ovarian cancer: This cancer usually occurs in women over age 50 but can affect younger women. It causes more deaths than any other cancer of the female reproductive system and is the leading cause of death from gynecologic cancer in the developed world. Its cause is unknown.

Screening and Diagnosis:

Among all three of these reproductive-system cancers, early detection is crucial. But detection can be very difficult, especially in the early stages.

Cervical cancer: The cancer may not cause any symptoms at first, but later, you may have pelvic pain or bleeding from the vagina. It usually takes several years for normal cells in the cervix to turn into cancer cells. A test called a Pap smear is very effective in screening for cervical cancer.

Endometrial cancer: A pelvic examination is frequently normal in the early stages of endometrial cancer. Changes in the size, shape, or consistency of the uterus or its surrounding, supporting structures may be seen when the disease is more advanced.

Ovarian cancer: The sooner ovarian cancer is found and treated, the better the chance for recovery. But ovarian cancer is hard to detect early. Many times, women with ovarian cancer have no symptoms or just mild symptoms until the disease is in an advanced stage and hard to treat. To date, there is no effective screening regimen for ovarian cancer. More than half of women with ovarian cancer have advanced-stage disease at the time of diagnosis.

Treatment:

Current treatments for all three cancers, especially in advanced stages, include surgery followed by chemotherapy or a combination of chemo and radiation therapies.

What Can I Do to Reduce My Risk?

-  **HPV Vaccine:** Some gynecologic cancers are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV), a very common sexually transmitted infection. Vaccines protect against the HPV types that most often cause cervical, vaginal, and vulvar cancers. It is recommended for 11- and 12-year-old girls and boys. Though there are several methods of prevention of cervical cancer, prevention by vaccination is emerging as the most effective option.
-  **Screening Tests:** The purpose of diagnostic tests is to find out, or diagnose, what is causing the symptoms. Diagnostic tests also may be used to check a person who is considered at high risk for cancer.

Of all the gynecologic cancers, only cervical cancer has a screening test—the Pap test—that can find this cancer early, when treatment works best.

Prevention:

Although there is no guaranteed way to prevent cancer, a healthy lifestyle, screening tests, and regular check-ups can help lower your risk of gynecologic cancer. In addition, recent scientific research has yielded further clues about reducing your risk for certain types of gynecologic cancers:

-  **Use of oral contraceptives:** Several studies have shown that oral contraceptives are related to a decreased risk of ovarian and uterine cancer.
-  **Smoking:** Quitting smoking decreases your risk of ovarian and uterine cancer.
-  **Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs):** Use condoms to reduce your risk of getting an STD, which can increase your risk of cervical cancer.
-  **Tubal ligation:** Studies have found that women who have had a tubal ligation (surgery to tie off the fallopian tubes to prevent pregnancy) have a decreased risk of ovarian cancer.

Reference Links:

-  <http://www.cwcare.net/services/oncology/preventing-gynecologic-cancer>
-  <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/stoi/deep-focus/Cancer-statistics-in-Indian-women/articleshow/16897858.cms>
-  http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gynecologic_oncology
-  http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/gynecologic/basic_info/prevention.htm
-  <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/magazine/issues/spring07/articles/spring07pg13.html>

For any enquiry or assistance please contact: wellness@medicaretpa.co.in

Disclaimer: No information contained here should be relied on in making health decisions. Always check with your doctor or other health care provider.