

A publication of the
Pinellas County Health Department

Cervical Cancer Awareness Month
What Every Woman Should Know

Cervical cancer is cancer in the cervix, the lower, narrow part of the uterus (womb). The uterus is the hollow, pear-shaped organ where a baby grows during a woman's pregnancy. The cervix forms a canal that opens into the vagina (birth canal), which leads to the outside of the body.



Approximately 12,000 women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer this year in the U.S. The good news is that this cancer is nearly 100 percent preventable and curable if it is found early.

Understanding Your Risk Factors

Your cervical cancer risk increases if:

- you have had an abnormal Pap test;
- you have never had a Pap test;
- you have had cancer in the past;
- you are a smoker;
- you have been infected with the human papillomavirus (HPV);
- You first had sex before age 16;
- your mother took DES (Diethylstilbestrol), a hormonal drug, when she was pregnant with you;
- you have had many sexual partners;
- you use or have used non-barrier birth control method; or
- you are age 50 or older.



Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms

Many times, symptoms do not appear until the cancer has invaded nearby tissue. When this happens, the most common symptom is abnormal vaginal bleeding, such as bleeding or spotting between regular menstrual periods. Other signs can include:

- bleeding after intercourse, douching, or after a pelvic exam;
- menstrual bleeding that lasts longer or is heavier than usual;
- bleeding after menopause; and
- increased or unusual discharge from the vagina (separate from your normal monthly menstrual period).

It's important to note that these symptoms may be caused by cancer or by other health problems. For example, an

infection can cause pain or bleeding. If you have any of these signs or other suspicious symptoms, you should see your health care professional right away. Ignoring symptoms may allow the cancer to progress to a more advanced stage and lower your chance for effective treatment.

Even better, don't wait for symptoms to appear. Have a regular Pap test and pelvic examination.

Early Detection is the Key

There are ways you can protect yourself against cervical cancer. Most importantly, get a regular health check-up that includes a Pap test and pelvic exam.

Most pre-cancerous conditions of the cervix can be detected with a Pap test and treated before cancer develops. A Pap test is a simple, painless test to detect abnormal cells in and around the cervix.

HPV causes almost all cases of cervical cancer. HPV is a common sexually transmitted virus that usually goes away by itself and rarely leads to cervical cancer. Most people with HPV never even know they have it. Ask your healthcare provider about screening for HPV.

Doctors recommend that women should be regularly screened for cervical cancer beginning three years after they start having sexual intercourse, but no later than age 21. Then screening should be done every year if your doctor uses a regular Pap test, or every two years if your doctor uses the newer liquid-based Pap test. Some women age 30 and older who have had three normal Pap tests in a row may need to be tested every two or three years.

Talk to your doctor about the screening schedule that is best for you, then follow through on that schedule.

For more information, visit www.cancer.org



The Pinellas County Health Department has a FREE breast and cervical cancer screening program for qualifying women who are 50 to 64 years of age. The program includes breast and pelvic exam, Pap test and mammogram. For more information, call (727) 824-6917.

Pinellas County Health Department

Take Charge of Your Health

Physical Activity for Everyone

The Florida “winter” weather is nice, the sun is shining, and outdoor activities are calling your name. Why not head to the beach or a local park for a picnic or take your family out for an afternoon at a nearby playground? Look for opportunities to enjoy activities such as biking, hiking, and canoeing. This year, remember that **it’s never too late - or too early - to begin an active lifestyle.**

The Importance of Physical Activity

The health benefits of regular physical activity are well known. Research has shown that it can help you...

- control weight;
- control high blood pressure;
- reduce risk for type 2 diabetes, heart attack, and many types of cancer;
- reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety;
- reduce arthritis pain and disability; and
- reduce risk for osteoporosis and falls.

How Much is Enough?



Adults should get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days, preferably all days of the week. **Children and teenagers** should get at least 60 minutes of physical activity most days of the week.

Most people can get greater health benefits by increasing the intensity or the amount of time that they are physically active. More intense or longer periods of physical activity may be needed to control body weight. **About 60 minutes a day may be needed to prevent weight gain.**

Overcoming Barriers

If you have a hard time getting started with regular physical activity, consider the following ways to overcome some common stumbling blocks.

Feel you don’t have enough time? Start by doing 10 minutes of physical activity a day and gradually work your way up to 30 minutes. Choose activities that are easy to fit into your everyday routine, such as walking or biking.

Can’t get motivated? Plan ahead. Make physical activity a regular part of your schedule. Invite a friend to exercise with you regularly. Join a group that promotes a fun and appealing activity, such as a hiking or walking club.

Have no place to be active? Look around your community for inexpensive, convenient places for physical activity, such as trails, parks and community rec centers.



Feel you have no athletic skills? Choose activities such as walking that require no new skills. You don’t need to be an accomplished athlete to enjoy being active. The confidence you gain from simpler activities can inspire you to try new ones.

Becoming More Active

Adults need “recess,” too! With a little creativity and planning, even a person with

the busiest schedule can make room for physical activity. For many people, time before or after work is often available to cycle, walk, or play sports. Think about your weekly or daily schedule and look for or make opportunities to be more active.

Consider the following suggestions:

- Walk or cycle to work, school, or the store.
- Park your car or get off the bus about a 10-minute walk away and walk the remaining distance.
- Take your dog on a long, brisk walk. You’ll enjoy it and your dog will too!
- At work, take 10-minute fitness breaks (such as a brisk walk around your office building) instead of taking cigarette or coffee breaks.
- You can even exercise at your desk! While sitting, extend your arms in front of you and lift them slowly straight over your head as you inhale deeply. As you exhale, let your arms, head and shoulders curl down and dangle toward the floor. Curl back upward, slowly and gently stretching the spine. Repeat 3 times.
- Avoid labor-saving devices. For example, use a push mower instead of a power mower for your lawn.
- Exercise while watching TV. Work out with hand weights; ride a stationary bicycle or perform stretching exercises.
- Dance to your favorite CD at home.
- Get a group of friends together for a morning walk.



Regular physical activity makes important contributions to your health. So this year, **take charge of your health by putting more physical activity into your life!**

**For more information, visit
www.PinellasWellness.com or
www.cdc.gov.**



Pinellas County Health Department
205 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. St. N.
St. Petersburg, FL 33701
(727) 824-6900

Website: www.PinellasHealth.com
Email: PinCHD52Info@doh.state.fl.us