



Foundation
for Women's Cancer

cervical · ovarian · endometrial/uterine · vaginal · vulvar

gynecologic cancer awareness



Know the Symptoms, Reduce the Risk

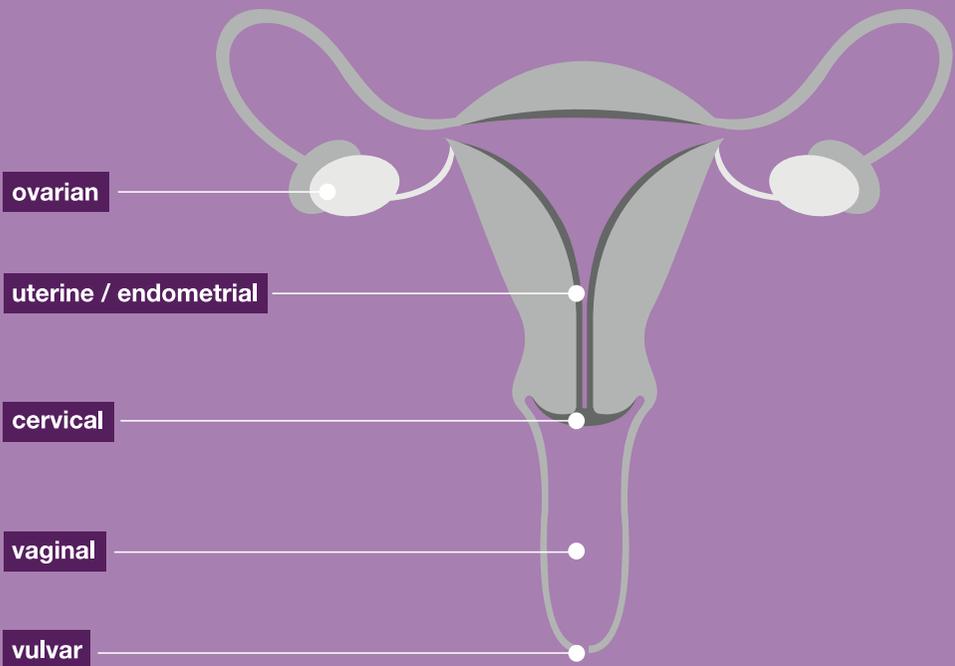


RESEARCH · AWARENESS · OUTREACH · EDUCATION

What is Cancer?

Cancer is a word used to define a collection of diseases that share one unique characteristic — the uncontrolled growth of cells that have the potential to spread (metastasize) to other parts of the body. Gynecologic cancers grow from female reproductive organ(s) including the cervix, uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, vagina and vulva.

Gynecologic Cancers



Each year approximately **110,000 women** in the United States are diagnosed with one of the five main gynecologic cancers: **cervical, ovarian, endometrial (uterine), vulvar or vaginal**. This brochure is designed to help you understand the symptoms and minimize your risk of serious health effects from reproductive tract cancers.

During September, **Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Month**, and throughout the year, the **Foundation for Women's Cancer** (FWC) puts increased emphasis on helping women understand the steps that can be undertaken to reduce the risks for these cancers and receive the earliest possible diagnosis through symptom recognition.

If you suspect you have or have been diagnosed with ovarian, endometrial/uterine, cervical, vulvar or vaginal cancer, it is important to see a **gynecologic oncologist**—medical doctors with specialized training in treating gynecologic cancers who can manage your care from diagnosis to completion of treatment.

Cervical Cancer

Cervical cancer is a cancer that begins in the cervix, the part of the uterus or womb that opens to the vagina. It is the part of the uterus that dilates and opens fully to allow a baby to pass into the birth canal. The normal cervix has two main types of cells: **squamous cells** that protect the outside of the cervix, and **glandular cells** that are mostly inside the cervix which make the fluid and mucus commonly seen during ovulation. Cervical cancer is caused by abnormal changes in either of these cell types in the cervix and is the only gynecologic cancer that can be prevented by regular screening and appropriate vaccination.

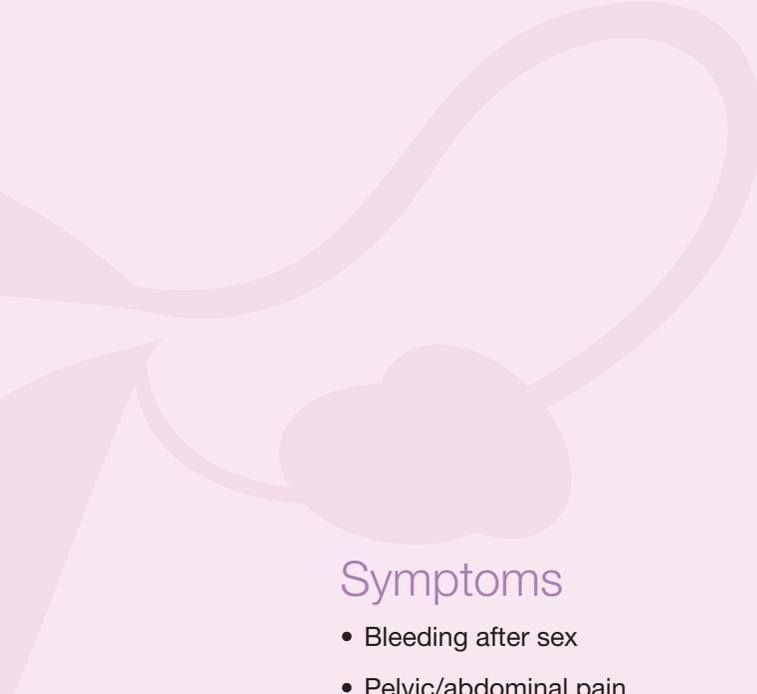
Know the Facts

- Most cases of cervical cancer are now preventable.
- Almost all cervical cancer is caused by a persistent infection with the human papillomavirus, or HPV.
- Vaccinating young children against HPV before they become sexually active can prevent cervical pre-cancer and cancer.
- Regular Pap tests and HPV testing are important in preventing cervical cancer.
- Cervical cancer usually affects women between ages 30 and 55, but younger and older women also are at risk.



The diagram shows a stylized, light purple outline of the female reproductive system, including the uterus, fallopian tubes, and vagina. A vertical line points from a grey rectangular box labeled 'cervix' to the cervix, which is the lower part of the uterus that opens into the vagina.

cervix

A decorative graphic in the top left corner consisting of several overlapping, rounded, pink shapes that resemble stylized petals or leaves, with a thin pink line curving through them.

Symptoms

- Bleeding after sex
- Pelvic/abdominal pain
- Excessive discharge and abnormal bleeding between periods

These symptoms may be caused by cancer or by other health problems. **It is important for a woman to see her doctor if she is having any of these symptoms.** Most women will have **no symptoms**, so getting vaccinations and regular Pap tests plus HPV tests when recommended is key to preventing cervical cancer. If your test results say you have cervical pre-cancer or cancer, seek care from a gynecologic oncologist.

Reducing Risk

- If your immune system does not function well (HIV, history of transplant, need for immunosuppressive medications like steroids or medicine for lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease, etc.), you may have a higher risk of cervical cancer.
- Don't smoke or quit smoking as soon as possible. Smoking weakens the immune system and a weakened immune system can lead to a persistent HPV infection.
- Get vaccinated before you become sexually active.
- Get Pap tests and HPV tests when recommended.
- Get an annual well woman's exam.

Ovarian Cancer

Ovarian cancer, the seventh most common cancer among women, usually starts on the surface of the ovary in cells that are called **epithelial cells**. About 85–90 percent of ovarian cancers are epithelial ovarian cancers. These cancer cells can implant themselves throughout the abdominal cavity.

Ovarian cancer, fallopian tube cancer, and primary peritoneal cancer (cancer that originates from the lining of the abdomen called the peritoneum) all have a similar type of growth and similar treatments are used. It is possible to have primary peritoneal cancer even though a woman's ovaries have been removed. There is growing scientific evidence to support the idea that ovarian cancer may actually begin in the fallopian tubes.

Know the Facts

- Ovarian cancer is the leading cause of death among the gynecologic cancers and the fifth leading cause of cancer death in women.
- Only 15% of all ovarian cancer cases are detected at the earliest, most curable stage.
- One in 71 women will develop ovarian cancer in her lifetime.
- Learn your individual risk of ovarian cancer.
- The Pap test only screens for cervical cancer and DOES NOT screen for ovarian cancer.

Symptoms

- Bloating
- Pelvic or abdominal pain
- Difficulty eating or feeling full quickly
- Urinary symptoms — urgency or frequency

Women who have these symptoms almost daily for more than a few weeks should see their doctor, preferably a gynecologist. Prompt medical evaluation may lead to early detection.

If you have symptoms of ovarian cancer that are frequent, persistent and new to you, ask your doctor to consider ovarian cancer as a possible cause. Most likely you do not have ovarian cancer, but if ovarian cancer is suspected or diagnosed, seek care from a gynecologic oncologist.

A diagram showing a fallopian tube and an ovary. The fallopian tube is a long, thin, light blue structure that curves from the top left towards the bottom right. The ovary is a smaller, light blue, bean-shaped structure located below the fallopian tube. A grey rectangular box with the text 'fallopian tube' is connected to the tube by a thin black line. Another grey rectangular box with the text 'ovary' is connected to the ovary by a thin black line.

fallopian tube

ovary

Risk Factors

- The risk of ovarian cancer increases with age, especially around the time of menopause.
- A family history of ovarian cancer, fallopian tube cancer, primary peritoneal cancer or premenopausal breast cancer, or a personal history of premenopausal breast cancer place women at heightened risk for ovarian cancer.
- Infertility and not bearing children are risk factors; whereas, pregnancy and the use of birth control pills decrease risk.
- Unfortunately, there is no general screening test for ovarian cancer. Get genetic testing if you have a new diagnosis of ovarian cancer. Genetic tests now screen not only for *BRCA1* and *BRCA2*, the most common gene mutations, but for a complete panel of genes less frequently associated with the risk for developing breast or ovarian cancer.
- Women need to understand their risk and listen to their bodies for symptoms.

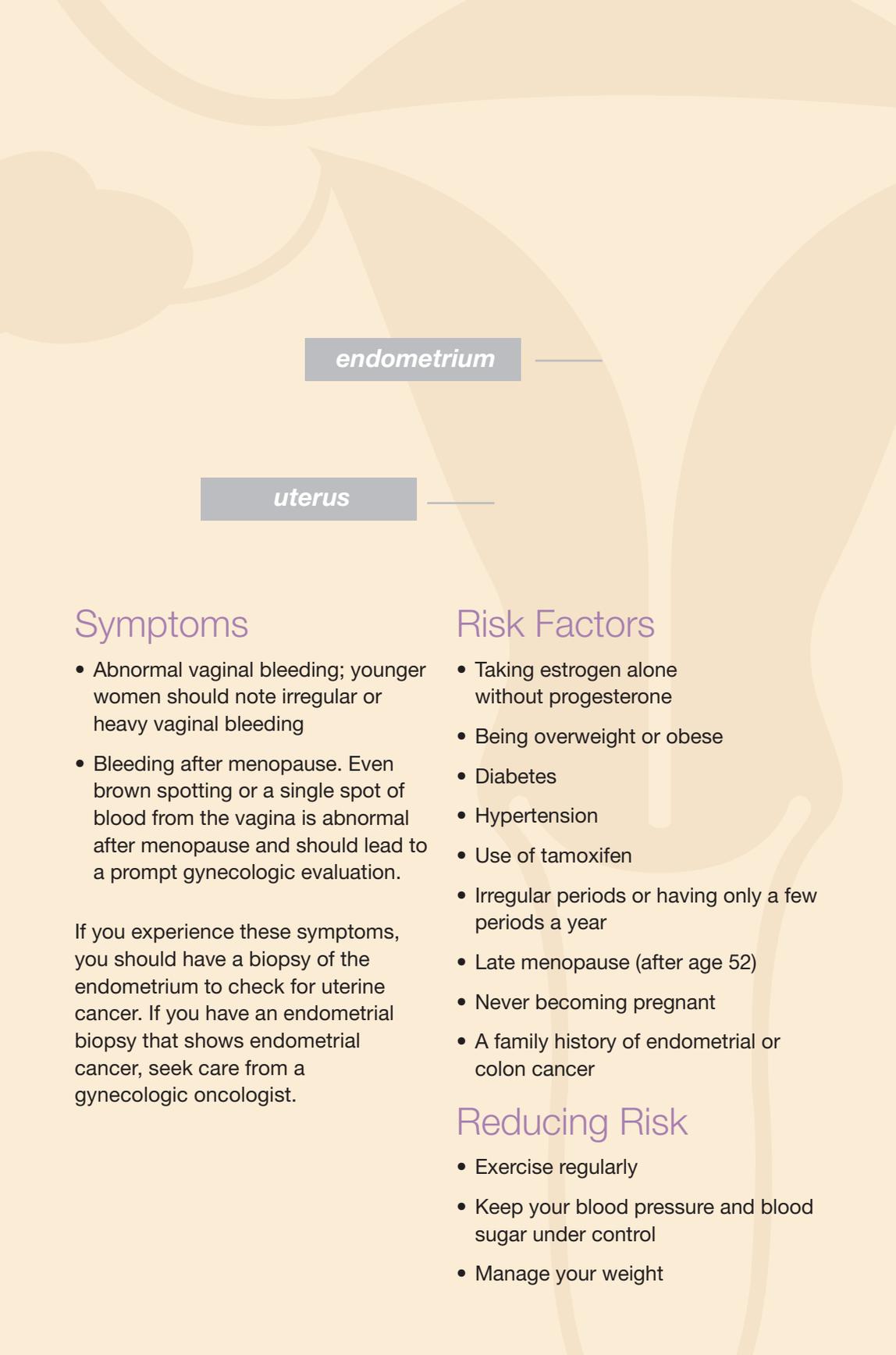
Endometrial (Uterine) Cancer

Most **uterine cancers** begin in the lining of the uterus (endometrium). The **endometrium** is the tissue shed each month with the menstrual cycle. In the most common type of uterine cancer, called endometrial adenocarcinoma, cells in the endometrial lining grow out of control and may invade the muscular wall of the uterus and sometimes spread outside of the uterus (ovaries, lymph nodes, abdominal cavity).

Uterine sarcomas represent a type of uterine cancer in which malignant cells form in the muscle of the uterus (leiomyosarcoma) or in the network of support cells in the uterine lining (endometrial stromal sarcomas and carcinosarcomas). Accounting for fewer than five percent of all uterine cancers, uterine sarcomas are much less common than endometrial cancer, but have a much more aggressive clinical behavior. These cancers can spread quickly to distant sites.

Know the Facts

- The most common uterine cancer is endometrial cancer, and it is the most common gynecologic cancer.
- Uterine cancer usually occurs around the time of menopause, but younger women also are at risk.
- There is no screening test for endometrial cancer.
- The Pap test only screens for cervical cancer and DOES NOT screen for uterine cancer.



endometrium

uterus

Symptoms

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding; younger women should note irregular or heavy vaginal bleeding
- Bleeding after menopause. Even brown spotting or a single spot of blood from the vagina is abnormal after menopause and should lead to a prompt gynecologic evaluation.

If you experience these symptoms, you should have a biopsy of the endometrium to check for uterine cancer. If you have an endometrial biopsy that shows endometrial cancer, seek care from a gynecologic oncologist.

Risk Factors

- Taking estrogen alone without progesterone
- Being overweight or obese
- Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Use of tamoxifen
- Irregular periods or having only a few periods a year
- Late menopause (after age 52)
- Never becoming pregnant
- A family history of endometrial or colon cancer

Reducing Risk

- Exercise regularly
- Keep your blood pressure and blood sugar under control
- Manage your weight

Vaginal Cancer

Vaginal cancer originates in the vagina, the muscular tube that connects the outer part of the female genitalia (vulva) to the uterus. Most vaginal cancers occur in the lining of the vagina (squamous epithelium). It typically is diagnosed in older women.

Know the Facts

- Vaginal cancer usually affects older women and may not cause symptoms in its earliest stage.

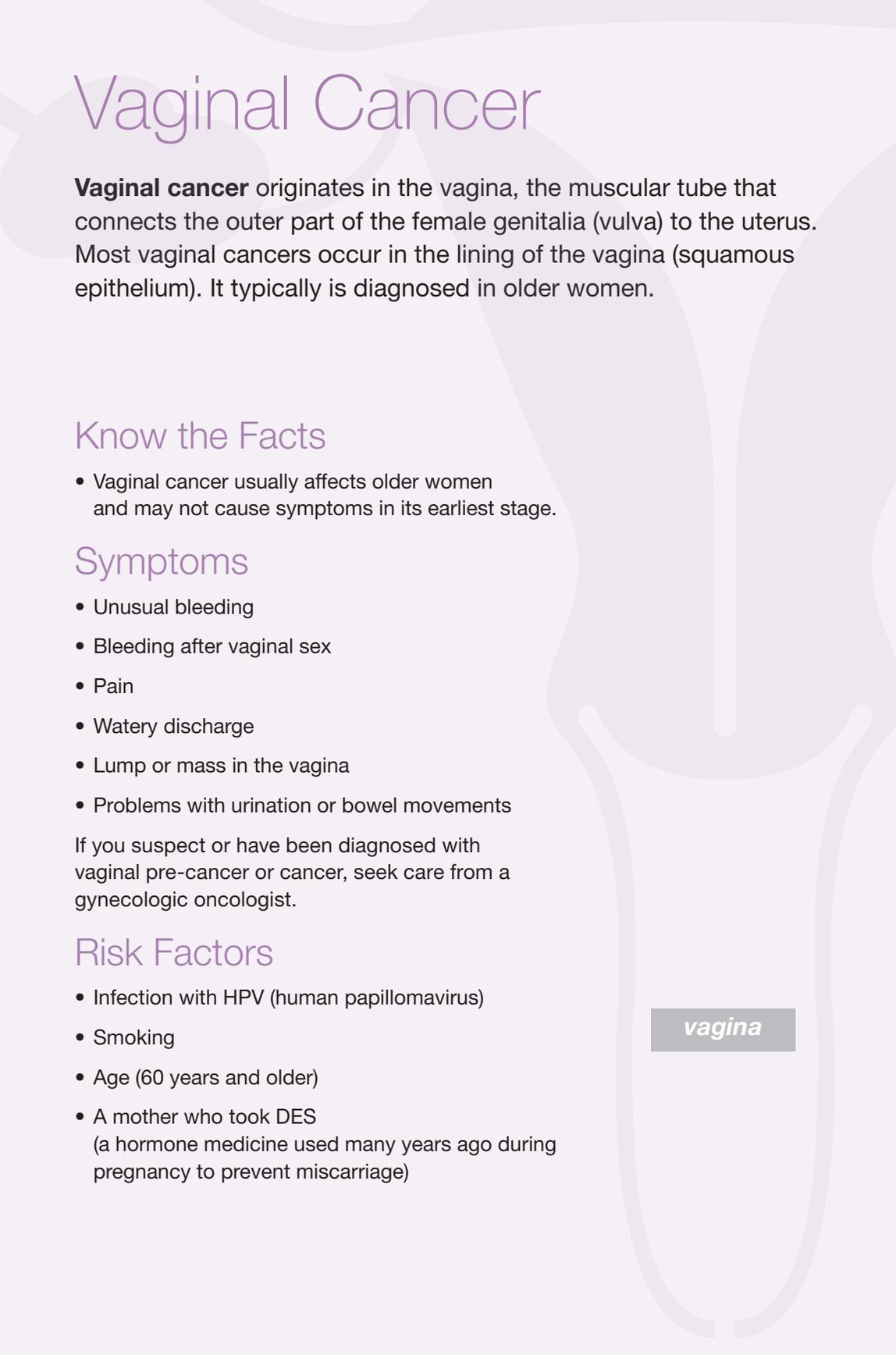
Symptoms

- Unusual bleeding
- Bleeding after vaginal sex
- Pain
- Watery discharge
- Lump or mass in the vagina
- Problems with urination or bowel movements

If you suspect or have been diagnosed with vaginal pre-cancer or cancer, seek care from a gynecologic oncologist.

Risk Factors

- Infection with HPV (human papillomavirus)
- Smoking
- Age (60 years and older)
- A mother who took DES (a hormone medicine used many years ago during pregnancy to prevent miscarriage)



vagina



Reducing Risk

- Don't smoke or quit smoking as soon as possible. Smoking weakens the immune system and a weakened immune system can lead to persistent HPV infection.
- Get vaccinated before you become sexually active.
- Undergo a regular well woman exam including a pelvic examination.
- Get Pap test and HPV tests when recommended.

Many precancerous conditions and early vaginal cancers can be detected through routine pelvic exams and Pap tests. Because many vaginal cancers are associated with HPV types 16 and 18, vaginal cancer now can be prevented by vaccinations advocated for the prevention of cervical cancer.

Vulvar Cancer

The **vulva** includes the labia majora (outer lips), the labia minora (inner lips), the clitoris and the opening of the vagina.

Vulvar cancer is caused by the growth and spread of abnormal cells within the skin of the labia and the skin surrounding the vaginal opening and the skin between the vagina and the anus (the perineum). Vulvar cancer most often affects the inner edges of the labia majora or the labia minora. Vulvar cancer can occur in young women as well as older women--the difference in causes is typically based on age.

Know the Facts

- Infection with HPV (human papillomavirus) is a common cause of vulvar cancer in young women. A history of vulvar warts can also cause vulvar cancer in young women.
- Vulvar cancer is typically a disease of older women. Women in their 70's, 80's and 90's should not blame external genital itching only to yeast and other infections.
- Vulvar cancer is very uncommon but can be cured if caught early. Use a mirror to examine your vulva for any changes.

Symptoms

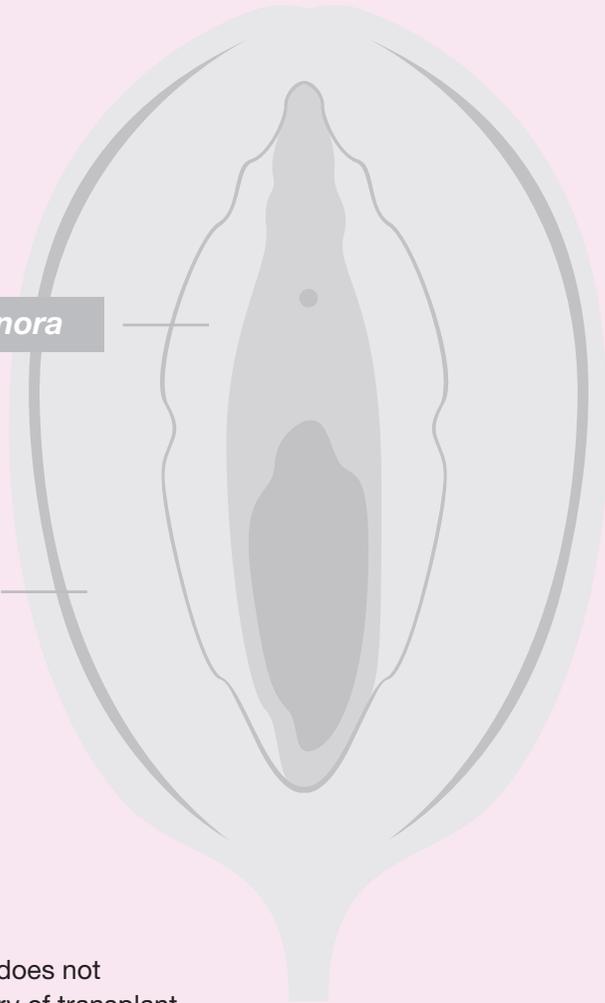
- Chronic itching
- Burning
- Pain
- Abnormal bleeding or discharge
- Skin color changes (lighter or darker, red or pink)
- Bump or lump with wart-like or raw surfaces
- Open sore (ulcer)

See your doctor, preferably a gynecologist, if you experience these symptoms. Have a biopsy of any abnormal growth or lesion in the genital area. If you suspect you have or have been diagnosed with vulvar cancer, seek care from a gynecologic oncologist.

vulva

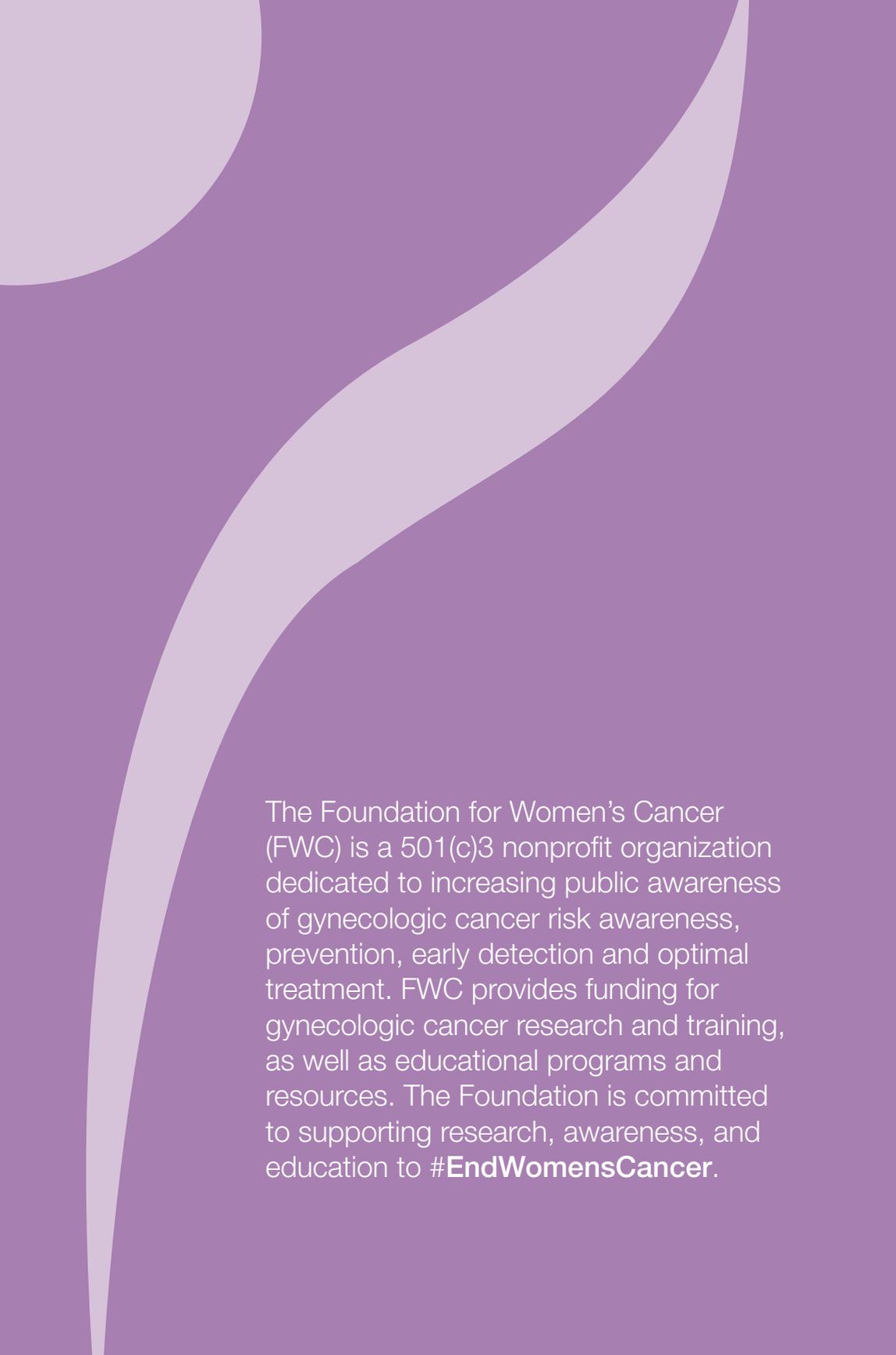
labia minora

labia majora



Risk Factors

If your immune system does not function well (HIV, history of transplant, need for immunosuppressive medications like steroids or medicine for lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease, etc.), you may have a higher risk of vulvar cancer.

The background is a solid purple color. On the left side, there are several abstract, flowing shapes in white and a lighter shade of purple, resembling a stylized figure or a decorative element. The text is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page.

The Foundation for Women's Cancer (FWC) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing public awareness of gynecologic cancer risk awareness, prevention, early detection and optimal treatment. FWC provides funding for gynecologic cancer research and training, as well as educational programs and resources. The Foundation is committed to supporting research, awareness, and education to **#EndWomensCancer**.

What can you do to help us End Women's Cancer?

Raise awareness about gynecologic cancers.

Donate to the Foundation for Women's Cancer online.

Participate in the **National Race to End Women's Cancer**
by running, walking or donating to a team.
endwomenscancer.org

Host your own fundraising event or partner with the Foundation.

Give a matching gift through your employer to the Foundation.

Give gifts of stock or securities to the Foundation.

Designate a planned gift to the Foundation.

To make a gift or for additional information, please email the Foundation
at info@foundationforwomenscancer.org or call **312.578.1439**.

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The Foundation for Women's Cancer (FWC) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing research, education and awareness about gynecologic cancer risk, prevention, early detection and optimal treatment.

foundationforwomenscancer.org
info@foundationforwomenscancer.org

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 @foundationforwomenscancer

phone 312.578.1439

fax 312.235.4059

Foundation for Women's Cancer

230 W. Monroe, Suite 710

Chicago, IL 60606-4703



Society of Gynecologic Oncology

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