

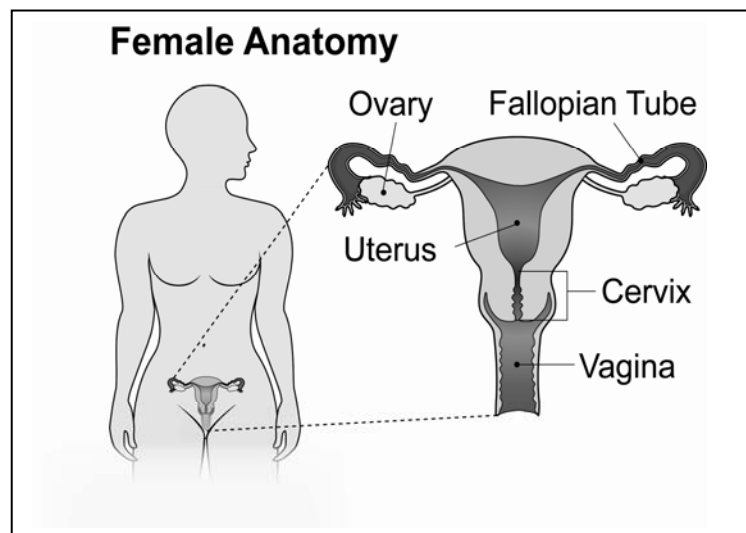
Quick Facts about Vaginal Cancer



PMH

What is the vagina?

The vagina is a hollow canal that connects the cervix and the uterus to the outside of the body. When a woman gives birth, the baby exits her body through the cervix and the vagina (called the birth canal).



What is vaginal cancer?

Vaginal cancer is a disease in which normal cells in the vagina begin to change, grow out of control, and form a mass of cells called a tumour. At first, the changes in a cell are precancerous (abnormal cells). If the precancerous cells change into cancer cells and spread deeper into the vagina or to other tissues and organs, the disease is then called vaginal cancer.

The two main types of vaginal cancer are:

- squamous cell carcinoma – starts in the cells that line the vagina
- adenocarcinoma – starts in the cells that form glands in the vagina

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What does stage mean?

The stage is a way of describing a cancer. Stage can describe:

- where the cancer is located
- if or where it has spread
- if it is affecting other organs in the body

There are four stages of vaginal cancer (Stage 1 to Stage 4). Your doctor will use the stage of your cancer to decide which treatment is best for you.

How is vaginal cancer treated?

The treatment of vaginal cancer depends on:

- the size and location of the tumour
- whether the cancer has spread
- your overall health

If the abnormal cells have become cancerous, the most common treatments are surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy.

Most side effects of vaginal cancer treatment can often be prevented or managed with help from your health care team. When making treatment decisions, you may also consider a clinical trial. Talk with your doctor about all treatment options.

Coping with Vaginal Cancer

Dealing with the news of a cancer diagnosis can be very difficult. You are not alone. Your health care team is here for you so feel comfortable speaking with them about your concerns and needs. As a patient in the Princess Margaret Cancer Program, you have access to many resources to help you cope. These include:

- social workers who can help you better cope with your illness
- clinical dietitians that specialize in cancer and can help you with your nutrition and diet concerns

- the PMH Cancer Survivorship Program which has programs and services to help you cope with cancer and its treatment, including:
 - a Survivorship Consult to answer questions you may have about your diagnosis and treatment and the resources available to you
 - Caring Voices (www.caringvoices.ca), an online support community where you can connect with other gynecologic cancer survivors through the Gynecologic Cancer Community
 - a Patient & Family Library where you can ask a Librarian to search for specific health information and borrow books, CDs and DVDs

For more information about the services available to you or to contact a social worker or dietitian, speak to a member of your health care team. To contact the PMH Cancer Survivorship program visit:

- The Cancer Survivorship Centre located on the 2nd floor of PMH
- The Patient & Family Library located in the atrium on the main floor of PMH
- ELLICSR: the Health, Wellness and Cancer Survivorship Centre located in the basement of the Clinical Services Building in the Toronto General Hospital

Questions to Ask your Doctor

Speaking to your health care team is important in helping you make decisions about your health care. Sometimes preparing a list of questions you want to ask can be helpful.

Here is a list of common questions you may want to ask your doctor:

1. What type of vaginal cancer do I have?
2. Can you explain my pathology report (test results) to me?
3. What stage is the vaginal cancer?
4. Has cancer spread to my lymph nodes or anywhere else?
5. Would you explain my treatment options?
6. How will this treatment benefit me?
7. What clinical trials are open to me?
8. How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
9. Will this treatment affect my ability to become pregnant or have children?
10. What is the expected timeline for my treatment plan?

11. What are the possible long-term side effects of my cancer treatment?
12. Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
13. Whom do I call for questions or problems?
14. Is there anything else I should be asking?

Medical Terms to Know

Benign: A tumour that is not cancerous

Biopsy: Removal of a tissue sample that is then looked at under a microscope to check for cancer cells

Chemotherapy: The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

Colposcopy: An examination of the cervix and vagina from outside the body with a magnifying instrument

Dysplasia: An abnormal growth of precancerous cells

Lymph node: A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Malignant: A tumour that is cancerous

Metastasis: The spread of cancer from where the cancer began to another part of the body

Oncologist: A doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer

Prognosis: Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy: The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

Tumour: A mass of tissue that requires a biopsy/removal