

Ladies, look out for these womb-related conditions

Mount Alvernia Hospital's Dr Timothy Lim explains the symptoms of cervical, uterine and ovarian cancers, and how they may be prevented



Among womb-related cancers, cervical cancer can be detected by early pap smears and HPV tests, while there are no screening methods for uterine and ovarian cancer. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Q What are the common symptoms of these cancers to look out for?

Uterine, ovarian and cervical cancer are the fourth, fifth and tenth most common cancers respectively that affect women in Singapore.

They generally arise from the lining of the uterus, but may sometimes occur from the muscle of the uterus, leading to uterine or endometrial cancer. These cancers usually affect women aged 40 and above, who may exhibit abnormal uterine bleeding post-menopause or have abnormal periods.

Ovarian cancer, in particular, is known as a silent killer as women are usually diagnosed in its advanced stages. The symptoms are usually non-specific, and patients may experience abdominal bloatedness, difficulty in eating and loss of appetite.

Cancer of the cervix is mainly caused by high-risk types of the human papilloma virus (HPV). Those with cervical cancer may have an abnormal screening test result, and/or show symptoms such as abnormal vaginal bleeding, such as bleeding after sex or abnormal vaginal discharge.

Q How are these cancers detected and what do I need to do?

Cervical cancer can be detected early through screening such as regular pap smears and HPV screening tests. In Singapore, pap smears are recommended for sexually active women aged 25 to 29, while the HPV test is recommended for those aged 30 to 69.

Unfortunately, there are no effective screening methods for uterine and ovarian cancers.

Q What can be done to reduce the risk of developing these cancers?

Cervical cancer can be effectively prevented by getting the HPV vaccine, whereas for uterine

cancer and ovarian cancer, there are some ways to reduce the risks.

The risk factors for uterine cancer include older age, obesity, metabolic syndrome, Type 2 diabetes, polycystic ovarian syndrome, a strong family history of uterine, colon and ovarian cancer, and individuals who are genetic carriers of Lynch syndrome.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle and taking birth control pills may help reduce the risk.

The risk factors for ovarian cancer include older age, endometriosis, a strong family history of ovarian cancer, or a mutation in the BRCA 1 or BRCA2 genes.

Taking birth control pills, pregnancy and breastfeeding may reduce the risk of ovarian cancer, as will undergoing tubal ligation.

Q What are the treatment options available for these cancers?

Cervical cancer treatment may involve surgery alone or with radiation therapy, and/or chemotherapy.

Ovarian cancer treatment usually involves surgery, followed by chemotherapy and/or targeted therapy, whereas for uterine cancer, treatment usually involves surgery first. There may be a need for radiotherapy or chemotherapy after surgery depending on the stage of the cancer.

If the cancers are diagnosed at an early stage, the five-year survival rate is excellent



Dr Timothy Lim

Timothy Lim Clinic for Women & Cancer Surgery
Mount Alvernia Hospital
820 Thomson Road
Medical Centre A #01-03
Singapore 574623