Cervical Cancer: Symptoms, Treatment, and Prevention

Cervical cancer is a source of concern for many women, considering it’s one of the most frequently diagnosed cancer for females. Although the mortality rate for this condition is in steady decline, cervical cancer is a real health threat that should never be ignored. Aside from receiving regular pap smears, a healthy understanding of cervical cancer is vital for prevention and early detection.

What is Cervical Cancer?

Cervical cancer tends to develop slowly inside the surface cells of the cervix. The cervix has two types of surface cells known as squamous and columnar. Squamous cells are where the majority of cervical cancers originate.

Cervical cancer is caused overwhelmingly by HPV (Human Papillomavirus). HPV is a commonly spread STD, taking various different forms and causing diverse effects for those afflicted. Some forms of HPV lead to cervical cancer and genital warts, other varieties of the illness prove to be harmless.

Prevention and Detection

Unfortunately, early cervical cancer rarely displays any warning symptoms. This is why regular Pap smears are so essential for prevention. Cervical cancer starts out as a pre-cancerous condition known as dysplasia. This condition is detectable during a routine pap smear and is completely treatable. Most women diagnosed with cervical cancer have gone years, even decades without a Pap smear.

If the results of a pap smear indicate abnormalities, a colposcopy is typically performed. This procedure magnifies the cervix and allows doctors to properly examine areas of concern.

When symptoms do occur, they typically consist of vaginal bleeding between periods, after intercourse and post-menopause. Other symptoms of cervical cancer include a pink and brown vaginal discharge that has a very distinct odor.

Treatment and Recovery

Thanks to advances in modern medicine, hysterectomies are rarely performed for cervical cancer that hasn’t spread. For early stage cases, cervical cancer can be completely cured by removing cancerous tissue. Several surgical methods exist to accomplish this.

Laser surgery is the most common and least intrusive way to cure cancer of the cervix. Other treatment methods exist, such as having abnormal cells frozen and removing
Treatment options are much more intrusive for advanced cervical cancer. Typically a radical hysterectomy will be performed, in which the uterus is completely removed along with much of the surrounding tissue. In only the most extreme circumstances will a pelvic exenteration take place. This high risk procedure involves removing all organs of the pelvis, such as the rectum and bladder.

In many situations, non-surgical options are available. Radiation treatment is commonly used for fighting cervical cancer. Internal radiation treatment consists of filling a medical device with radiation and inserting it inside the vagina.

While this certainly doesn’t sound pleasant, it’s actually an effective method of treatment. The device is removed before the patient leaves the hospital. External radiation may also be used by having machines beam radiation down on cancerous areas.

No woman needs to become a victim of cervical cancer Regular pap smears and practicing safe sex will all but ensure one never has to experience the burden of this disease.

For more information about cervical cancer, please visit: http://www.nccc-online.org/