



Together we will beat cancer

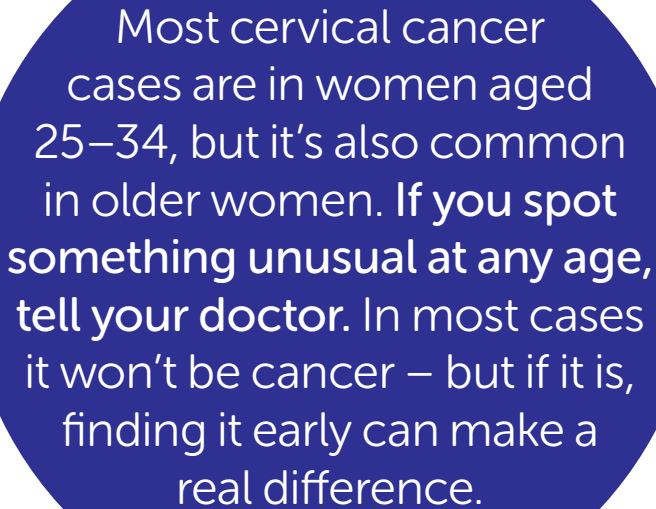
Spot cervical cancer early



Take charge

Whether you've heard about it from a friend or family member, seen it in the news, or are just curious: if you want to know more about spotting cervical cancer early, this leaflet is for you.

You'll find out about possible symptoms, HPV vaccination, screening, and tips for telling your doctor if something's not quite right.



Most cervical cancer cases are in women aged 25–34, but it's also common in older women. **If you spot something unusual at any age, tell your doctor.** In most cases it won't be cancer – but if it is, finding it early can make a real difference.

Listen to your body

When it comes to your health, remember you're in charge.

Talk to your doctor if you notice any unusual bleeding, or any other changes that aren't normal for you, including:

- Bleeding during or after sex
- Bleeding after the menopause
- Bleeding between periods
- Changes to your vaginal discharge

These are more likely to be signs of other common conditions – but it's still best to get any unusual changes checked out.

Have you noticed any of these? You could highlight or circle them and show this page to your doctor.

What is a cervix?

Most people who were born female have a cervix. It is the entrance to the womb from the vagina.



What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a common infection. Most people will get it at some point in their lives, and it usually doesn't cause problems. This is because our bodies are usually able to clear the infection. But some high-risk types of HPV can cause cell changes that can lead to cancer if they're not treated.

How is HPV passed on?

HPV passes from person to person through sexual contact. It is possible to become infected even if you've only had sexual contact with someone once.

Reducing the risk



The HPV vaccine: There is a safe and effective vaccine that protects against the main types of HPV. It is offered to all children aged 11–13.



Go smoke free: Smoking can make it harder to fight off HPV. Contact your free local Stop Smoking Service or speak to a doctor, nurse or pharmacist for help stopping.

What is cervical screening and who is it for?

Screening is for people who don't have any symptoms.

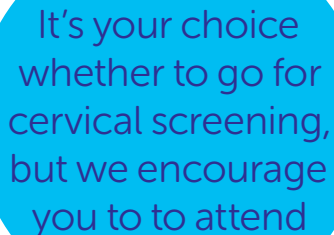
It looks for HPV infection in cells and early cell changes. Any abnormal cells can then be treated, which can stop cervical cancer from developing in the first place. And the benefits of screening can last for years after you've been tested.

Anyone with a cervix can go for screening. If you're 25–64 and registered as female with the GP, you'll be sent an invitation. Read the information that comes with your invitation, so you can decide if you'd like to take part.

If you aren't invited for screening, but think it might still be relevant for you, speak to your GP.

You should still consider cervical screening even if you've had the HPV vaccine, as it doesn't protect you against all types of HPV.

And even if you've been screened, tell your doctor if you notice anything that's not normal for you.



It's your choice whether to go for cervical screening, but we encourage you to attend



Cervical screening saves thousands of lives every year in the UK

Is cervical screening for me if I've not been sexually active recently or have only had one partner?

Yes. HPV can stay in the body for a long time. Consider screening even if you aren't currently having sex, have a long-term partner, or have only had sex with one person.

Is cervical screening for me if I've never had penetrative sex?

Yes. HPV can be passed on through any form of sexual contact. This includes vaginal, anal or oral sex, sharing sex toys, and any skin-to-skin sexual contact.

Do I need to prepare anything before my appointment?

No. There is nothing you need to do beforehand. It might seem a bit embarrassing, but nurses carry out hundreds of cervical screening tests each year. Just try not to make an appointment for when you're on your period.

Does cervical screening hurt?

For most people cervical screening won't be painful, but everybody is different, and some might find it uncomfortable. Some things that might make it easier for you are:

- When booking, you can ask for a female or male nurse
- At your appointment, ask the nurse to use a smaller speculum (the tool used to see the cervix) or to help you find a more comfortable position
- Take a trusted family member or friend with you for support
- Wearing a loose dress, skirt, or long top can help you feel more covered – you can keep this on during screening.

Talk to your doctor

Talking to your doctor isn't always easy. Here are our tips to get the most out of your appointment:



Be honest. Tell the doctor about anything that's not normal for you, even if it doesn't seem that important or you think it might be a bit embarrassing. They've seen and heard it all before.



Be thorough. Mention all your symptoms and don't put it down to 'just getting older', or assume it's part of another health condition. If it's something that's bothering you, then your doctor will want to hear about it.



Stick with it. Don't worry you might be wasting your doctor's time. Even if you've been to see them already, they want to know if your symptoms haven't gone away, or if something still doesn't feel quite right.



Be prepared. Have a think about the changes, and roughly how long you've had them for. Writing down the things you want to say can help. And you can always bring a trusted friend or family member with you for support.

Early diagnosis saves lives

Remember, when cervical cancer is spotted early, treatment is more likely to be successful. Thanks to research, treatments are kinder and more effective than ever.



We're online...

Learn more about spotting cancer early, including information about screening across the UK, at cruk.org/spotcancerearly

Find out more about cervical screening at cruk.org/cervicalscreening

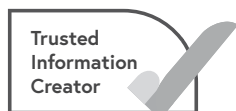


...and on the phone

Our Nurse Helpline is there if you're looking for any information or support. Just call **0808 800 4040**.

To provide any feedback on this leaflet or if you would like to know more about the sources used to create it, call **020 3469 8333** or email publications@cancer.org.uk

And if you have any questions about Cancer Research UK or would like to support us call **0300 123 1022**.



Patient Information Forum

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