

Cervical Cancer: Screening, Screening and more Screening

“Cervical Cancer Screening takes just five minutes, but it can save a woman’s life”. This is the message to be reinforced at the European Cervical Cancer Prevention Week, between 25 and 31 January, which draws attention to the need for screening.

Certain diseases when detected early, can improve the quality of life of the patient, increase the survival rate and effectiveness of the treatment, cervical cancer is one of them. In some cases, screening makes it possible to prevent and cure some diseases that, if not diagnosed in time, can become incurable or even lead to an early and preventable death.

Certain screening tests can reduce the mortality rate by 80%, as is the case with cervical cancer.

Cervical cancer begins in the cells that line the cervix, that is, the lower part of the womb. Despite having a high incidence, this disease, when detected early, is treatable. Usually cervical cancer develops gradually, over several years, beginning with

precancerous cells that later develop into cancer. However, in most situations these cells end up disappearing without the need for treatment, however there are cases that evolve into invasive cancer in less than a year.

These alterations can be detected early through a cervical cytology exam, commonly known as Pap Smear. It consists of scraping the surface of the cervix and collecting a cell sample. This test should be performed on women age 25 to 64 years, and also other age group if other risk factors are known to exist. In principle, it should be performed annually, and after two consecutive negative results, intervals can be extended to three years.

You might find going for smear tests difficult (especially at the moment). So, make sure you know the

symptoms: i) vaginal bleeding that is unusual for you (after menopause, between regular periods or after sex); ii) changes in the vaginal discharge; iii) pain or discomfort during sex and iv) unexplained pain in the lower back or between the hip bones (pelvis). Attention: these symptoms are not usually cervical cancer, but it’s important to contact your doctor and get them checked out. Don’t wait for cervical screening (a smear test).

Some factors can alter the accuracy of the Pap Smear and should be taken into account: it should not be performed during the menstrual period and 48 hours prior to the exam, patients should abstain from sexual intercourse, using tampons, vaginal creams, moisturizers, lubricants or vaginal medications.

In recent years, in addition to cytology, new techniques for screening



this type of cancer have been introduced, such as the human papilloma virus test, aka HPV, which has substantially improved the effectiveness and sensitivity for an early detection. For teenagers and young women vaccine immunization against the HPV virus provides almost 100% protection against some types of persistent infection. The HPV test and the HPV vaccination in combination with cytological screening, will allow for a global and drastic reduction in

cervical cancer.

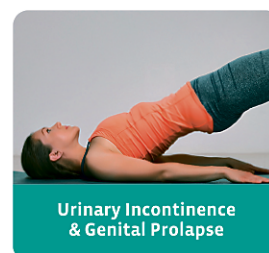
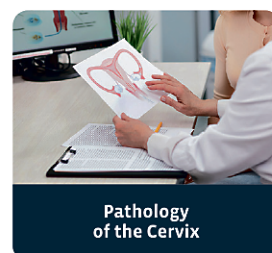
However, since screening is considered a secondary preventative measure, it is always important to reinforce aspects related to primary prevention directly related to avoiding risks by altering behaviour: HPV infection, Chlamydia infection, tobacco, eating habits, weakened immune system, oral contraceptives, use of intrauterine device, sexual history, family history.

Because your health is of Particular Importance.



CERVICAL CANCER

Have you had your Cervical Screening?



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