Understanding the 8 Types of Pelvic Cancer and Their Symptoms

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Pelvic Cancer Explained

The pelvis is the lower part of the abdomen between the hips, which includes the lower end of the bowel, the bladder, pelvic bones, lymph nodes, blood vessels, and nerves. In men it also includes the prostate, penis, and testicles. In women the pelvis contains the womb, cervix, vagina, ovaries, and fallopian tubes. In this article, we are going to take a look at types of pelvic cancer and what symptoms they present with.

What is Pelvic Cancer?

Pelvic cancer involves a cancer of these organs or structures within the pelvis. It includes bladder cancer, rectal cancer, bone cancer, chondrosarcoma (cancer of the cartilage), gynecological cancers (for women) or penile/prostate/testicular cancer for men.

What Causes Pelvic Cancer?

Cancer is caused by cells that grow out of control, which can happen anywhere in the body. The exact causes of pelvic cancer are often unknown, but many are linked with lifestyle factors, age, family history, and exposure to substances such as chemicals and asbestos.

For example, bladder cancer is predominantly caused by smoking and exposure to industrial chemicals, such as arsenic.

Cervical cancer is caused by the human pappilomavirus (HPV) which is a group of viruses that are spread during sexual intercourse. HPV also causes other pelvic cancers, such as anal, penile, vaginal, and vulva cancers.

What Are the Risk Factors for Pelvic Cancer?

Age is a risk factor for many pelvic cancers, and older people are more likely to get prostate, chondrosarcoma (cartilage), uterine, ovarian, vaginal, penile, and rectal cancer.

Some of the bone cancers which involve the pelvis affect younger people and children. For example, osteosarcoma is more likely to affect teens and young adults and Ewing’s sarcoma is most common among people between 5 and 20.

Risk factors for cervical and vaginal cancer include having unprotected sex with several partners from a young age. This is due to the increased chances of exposure to the human papillomavirus (HPV).

Diet, smoking, obesity, and alcohol are risk factors for some pelvic cancers, such as rectal cancer, bladder cancer, ovarian cancer, kidney cancer, and penile cancer. Ethnicity is another factor, with more Black women likely to get uterine cancer.

Similarly, black and Hispanic/Latino women have an increased risk of cervical cancer. White, non-Hispanic men are more likely to get testicular cancer compared with Asian or Black men.

What Are the Symptoms of Pelvic Cancer?

Although each type of pelvic cancer has different symptoms, many share the same signs. Lower abdominal or pelvic pain is common, and changes to bowel or urinary habits are other signs. Unusual bleeding, discharge, lumps and bumps should always be investigated. Likewise, if you lose weight unexpectedly, with no apparent cause, or feel unusually bloated, then you should get checked by a doctor.

Symptoms of bladder cancer include:

- Pelvic pain
- Blood in your urine
- Fatigue
- Pain when peeing
- Incontinence

Symptoms of rectal cancer:

- Blood in the stools
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fatigue
- Abdominal pain
- Changes in bowel habits
- Itching in your back passage
- Diarrhea or constipation

Lower back pain and blood in your urine are symptoms of kidney cancer

Symptoms of ovarian cancer:

- Needing to pee more frequently
- Having a bloated stomach
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Loss of appetite
- General pelvic discomfort

Symptoms of vaginal cancer:

- Unusual bleeding or discharge
- Changes to bowel or peeing habits
- Blood in the urine or stools
- Changes to the vulva
- Experiencing pain during sex
- Unusual itching or bleeding

Symptoms of uterine cancer:

- Abnormal and heavy bleeding
- Bleeding between periods
- Bad cramping period pains
- Unusual discharge

Symptoms of testicular cancer:

- Changes to the size or feel of a testicle
- A lump in the testicle, lower back or abdominal pain
- Changes in bowel habits
- Growth of breast tissue

General issues with peeing are signs of prostate cancer, including needing to pee frequently, rushing to the toilet, struggling starting to pee, and feeling that you have not emptied your bladder fully. Another symptom is if you have blood in your urine or semen.

What Are the Treatment Options for Pelvic Cancer?

Once diagnosed, a treatment plan will be arranged. This will typically include surgery to remove the tumor, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy.

Wait-and-See Approach

Some cancers may not require active treatment. For example, if no symptoms are being experienced from prostate cancer and it is not getting any worse, then doctors may simply keep an eye on it. In older men, prostate cancer may not limit their natural lifespan so active surveillance is put in place. This involves arranging regular blood tests to check PSA levels and maybe MRI scans or biopsies to check for progression.

Surgery

Other cancers require more invasive treatment in more advanced cases if the cancer has spread. This includes extensive operations to remove areas of the pelvis. For example, the anal canal, rectum, and part of the colon for advanced anal cancer.

Laser Treatment

Laser treatment can be used in some cancers that are detected early to destroy precancerous cells or shrink tumors. Examples of where this might be used include penile, cervical, vulva, and vaginal cancers.

Hormone Therapy

If a cancer is hormone-sensitive, then hormone therapy can be part of the treatment plan. The therapy blocks or lowers the levels of hormones in the body, to prevent the cancer or slow its growth. This can be effective for prostate, ovarian, and uterine cancers.

Immunotherapy

Immunotherapy could be offered. For example, in patients with advanced cancers. This involves using the body’s immune system to attack the cancer cells.

Early Diagnosis is Key

As with most cancers, if caught early, then pelvic cancer can be effectively treated and cured, so always check symptoms with a doctor. If a diagnosis is made, then they will formulate a treatment plan for the best chance of a speedy recovery.