

## **Cervical Cancer: Know Your Risk**

Several risk factors increase a woman's chance of getting cervical cancer. Knowing your risk factors and how to prevent them can significantly decrease your chances of getting cervical cancer.

The most important risk factor is infection with HPV, the human papillomavirus. There are more than 100 types of strains of HPV, a diverse group of viruses that infect the skin and mucous membranes.

HPV is commonly known as the virus that causes warts and some types of the virus cause genital warts. The types of HPV that cause visible warts usually are not the same types that cause abnormal cervical cell changes or cancer of the cervix. These are called "high-risk" HPV. HPV is passed from one person to another during sex. Having unprotected sex, especially at a young age, makes HPV infection more likely. Also, women who have many sexual partners, or who have sex with men who have had many partners, have a greater chance of getting HPV.

Right now, there is no cure or treatment for HPV that causes changes in the cells of the cervix, but often the HPV infection goes away on its own without any treatment. HPV occurs mainly in young women and is less common in women older than 30. We don't know why this is so. Condoms may protect against HPV when they are used correctly. It is important to use them because they do protect against AIDS and other sexual diseases.

The Pap test can find changes in the cells of the cervix caused by HPV. While there is no cure for HPV, the abnormal cell growth they cause can be treated. In the future, however this problem may disappear. Vaccines have been made that will prevent infection with HPV. Right now, one vaccine has been approved for use by the FDA and others are in development.

Even though HPV is an important risk factor for cervical cancer, most women with this infection do not get cervical cancer. Doctors believe other factors must come into play for this cancer to develop. Some of these factors are listed below.

**Smoking:** Women who smoke are about twice as likely as those who don't to get cervical cancer. Tobacco smoke can produce chemicals that may damage the DNA in cells of the cervix and make cancer more likely to occur.

**HIV infection** (human immunodeficiency virus): HIV is the virus that causes AIDS (it is not the same as HPV). It can also be a risk factor for cancer of the cervix. Being HIV positive makes a woman's immune system less able to fight both HPV and early cancers.

**Chlamydia infection:** This is a rather common kind of bacteria that can infect women. Many women do not know they have it unless samples taken at the time of their Pap test are looked at for the bacteria. Some studies suggest that women who have this infection, or have had it in the past, are at greater risk for cancer of the cervix. While further studies are needed to find out if this is true, there are good reasons to avoid this infection or to have it treated. Long-term infection can cause other serious problems.

**Diet:** Diet can play a part as well. Diets low in fruits and vegetables are linked to an increased risk of cervical and other cancers. Also, women who are overweight are at a higher risk.

January 22, 2007

**Birth control pills:** Long-term use of birth control pills increases the risk of this cancer. Some studies show a higher risk after five or more years of use. You should talk to your doctor about the pros and cons of birth control in your own case.

**Having many pregnancies:** Woman who have had many full-term pregnancies have an increased risk of this cancer. No one really knows why this is, but it has been proven beyond doubt by large studies.

**Low income:** Poor women are at greater risk for cancer of the cervix. This may be because they cannot afford good health care, including Pap tests.

**DES (diethylstilbestrol):** This drug is a hormone that was used between 1940 and 1971 for some women who were in danger of miscarriages. The daughters of women who took this drug have a slightly higher risk.

**Family history:** Recent studies suggest that women whose mother or sister has had cervical cancer are more likely to get the disease themselves. This could be because they are less able to fight off HPV than other women, or other factors could be involved.

The good news is you can be screened for cervical cancer every year and, if found early, the cancer can be treated. Cervical Cancer Awareness Month is a great time to visit your doctor for your yearly Pap test. Don't delay.

### **Supervisor Responsibility – Contract Employee Orientation Checklist**

All supervisors are responsible for providing contractor orientation to contract employees, temporary employees and hires from temporary service agencies on the first day of employment with the Cabinet. The Contract Employee Orientation Checklist (<http://chfsnet.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/58A397BF-CBCA-4D05-98AE-C8A2F9951376/0/conemporientcklst.doc>) should be followed to ensure these employees are aware of Cabinet policies and have signed all necessary documentation.

If you have any questions, contact the Office of Human Resource Management at (502) 564-7770.

### **Living Well**

#### **Acknowledging Weight Loss**

*By Kris Hayslett, Wellness Coordinator*

We have almost gotten through the first month of the new year and many people who were serious about losing weight may be seeing some results. The results are what we need to address. What do you say to someone who has lost a noticeable amount of weight? "Have you lost weight? You're looking great!"

This question and compliment is very common and you have probably found that you have said this to someone at some point. However this comment can imply a lot more to a person who may struggle with his or her weight. Some people may wonder:

- Did I look horrible before?
- Is physical size more important than health?
- Does weighing less on a scale make me a better person?
- If the weight is regained am I a bad person?

I am sure most people don't think asking about weight loss or giving a compliment to a person for their hard work would be a loaded question or comment. However, sometimes in the minds of people trying to lose weight, these are questions that they struggle with. The mere fact that others are taking notice of them and showering them with praise introduces the new pressure of getting to an ideal size or scale weight and fighting to stay there.

An article in *American Fitness* told the story of a medical student who started to feel like her life was out of control. In an attempt to find something that she could take charge of, she decided to monitor her diet and exercise. Instead of slowly taking off the weight, she became compulsive by over-exercising and dieting to the point that she dropped 20 pounds in a short amount of time. Now remember, this student was in medical school and actually in a hospital where she was surrounded by doctors and nurses who know better.

Instead, the student was showered with comments of "you've lost weight, you look wonderful," or "I barely have time to sleep and you find time to run early in the morning and at night after work." These praises and compliments came endlessly. No one ever thought to say "you look very thin, are you OK?" In this case, there were underlying problems the woman faced but those that interacted with her failed to say the appropriate words. In a case like this, it's important to remember: Thin does not always equal healthy.

Whether a person has lost 5 pounds or 25 pounds, shift the focus away from physical weight or size changes to praise in regards to getting healthy.

- You look like you have been working hard at the gym? How are your workouts going?
- You look energized today. How are you feeling?

If a person is trying to lose weight appropriately, they will feel great and be ready to share their hard work. At that point, be a good listener and let them brag. Also, respect their hard work and commitment by trying not to tempt them with unhealthy options or rewards.

Often, saying nothing at all might be best. Weight loss is a personal issue and the best way to support a person trying to lose weight is to show appreciation for them as a person. People don't want to be judged from the outside in. Losing weight does not make a person more likeable or better, but if done properly, it will give them more energy, make them feel happier and healthier.

### Focus Health Tip of the Week

In recognition of Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, we want to remind the women of CHFS to include an annual Pap test in your yearly health check. Here are some guidelines about screening for cervical cancer.

- Women should start cervical cancer screening about three years after they begin having vaginal intercourse, but no later than when they are 21 years old. Screening should be done every year with the regular Pap test or every two years using the newer liquid-based Pap test.
- Beginning at age 30, women who have had three normal Pap test results in a row may get screened every two to three years. Another reasonable option for women over 30 is to get screened every 3 years (but not more frequently) with either the conventional or liquid-based Pap test, plus the HPV DNA test.
- Women 70 years old or older who have had three or more normal Pap tests in a row and no abnormal Pap test results in the last 10 years may choose to stop having cervical cancer screening. Women with a history of cervical cancer, DES exposure before birth, HIV infection or a weakened immune system should continue to have screening as long as they are in good health.
- Women who have had a total hysterectomy (removal of the uterus and cervix) may also choose to stop having cervical cancer screening, unless the surgery was done as a treatment for cervical cancer or pre-cancer. Women who have had a hysterectomy without removal of the cervix should continue to follow the guidelines above.

For more information, contact the American Cancer Society at 1-800-ACS-2345 or online at [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org).

## Employee Enrichment

By Anya Armes Weber

*Employee Enrichment is a weekly feature for CHFS staff. These tips for making work better focus on team building, customer service and personal development.*

The beginning of a new year is a good time to reset your professional goals. Career consultant Joni Rose, who writes for [suite101.com](http://suite101.com), recommends the “SMART” method. The letters of the acronym stand for the following:

**Specific** – Be concrete, because a vague goal can’t be measured and is an invitation to procrastinate.

**Measurable** – This standard requires benchmarking achievements and comparing those of the past and present. If you have never quantified your work, you’ll need to start to meet this principle.

**Agreed To** – Make sure your supervisors comply with your goals. If your plan doesn’t suit the agency’s mission, you may be misusing your time.

**Realistic** – Be sure your goal is attainable according to your time frame and resources.

**Time Phased** -- A deadline must be part of your goal, or you will probably lose momentum. If you can’t set a deadline, reconsider your overall goal.