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Smoking and Cervical Cancer

If you smoke, you have an increased chance of developing precancerous lesions of the cervix (called moderate or severe dysplasia) and an increase in the chance of developing cervical cancer. Smoking greatly increases your risk for dysplasia and cancer compared to your risk for those problems if you don't smoke.

Smoking weakens your immune system. You become more likely to be affected by HPV (human papilloma virus). This virus can cause genital warts, precancers, and cancer of the cervix and genital area. Smoking reduces the immune system cells that are important in fighting the HPV virus. That means that people who smoke have less of a chance of getting rid of the HPV virus, and more of a chance of developing a precancer or cancer.

Also, high concentrations of nicotine and other cancer-causing harmful substances from cigarettes have been found in cervical mucus. These substances, called carcinogens, may damage the genes in cervical cells. Because HPV can block our cancer fighting genes, the damage to the cervical cell genes caused by smoking cannot be repaired. This allows the cells to form a precancer that can lead to cancer.

There are many websites dedicated to helping you to stop smoking. Here are several excellent sites that are free to use:

National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute: <http://www.smokefree.gov/>

American Cancer Society:

http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_10_13X_Guide_for_Quitting_Smoking.asp?sitearea=PED

American Lung Association: <http://www.ffsonline.org/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/how2quit.htm>

Your local state Department of Health and your health care provider can also give you additional information on how to quit smoking.

So the best thing you can do to avoid developing cervical cancer is to follow the instructions of your health care provider by returning for follow-up appointments, and to

Stop Smoking!

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