

HEALTH

Pap smears detect cervical cancer

Special to Sentinel-Voice

A Pap smear is a vital screening tool, but women who "pass" this widely administered test shouldn't think they are off the hook for gynecological cancer, says a Stanford gynecologist who specializes in cancer.

The Pap smear screens only for cervical cancer — and not for cancers of the ovaries, uterus, endometrium or other reproductive organs. Rarely, the test may also pick up cells from another form of cancer. "But it generally doesn't detect the other forms of cancer, so women need to work with their doctors to screen for these as well," says Dr. James A. Roberts, professor of gynecology and obstetrics at Stanford University Medical Center.

Every year, approximately 15,000 women in the United States are diagnosed with cervical cancer — and every year, nearly 5,000 women die from this disease, according to the American Cancer Society.

Papsmears, widely used in the United States since the 1950s, analyze cells

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— Dr. James A. Roberts

taken from the cervix. Recent studies have shown that this test, if performed regularly, can reduce mortality from cervical cancer by 25 to 80 percent through early detection, according to the National Cancer Institute.

But the test is not foolproof — sometimes it misses cancer cells, or mistakes normal cells for malignant ones — so it's important to view it as a useful tool, not a definite answer.

"A biopsy — sampling a small amount of tissue and sending it to a lab for analysis — is a more definite test, but the Pap smear is the guide we use to determine whether this more complex test is warranted," Roberts said.

Other cancers, such as those of the

breast, colon or lungs, have different screening tests and criteria, notes Roberts, and women should discuss with their physicians possible warning signs that may occur with other common cancers.

Roberts says physicians and national organizations generally agree that a woman should get a Pap smear once a year for at least a few years after she becomes sexually active or reaches age 18.

"There is some disagreement about whether the test should continue to be performed annually, but virtually no one believes that it should be given less than once every three years," he said.

The average age of diagnosis for cervical cancer is 47, but most of these women have abnormal cells that are detectable on a Pap smear as early as 20 years before an active case of the disease develops.

"If these cases are caught early, the cancerous growth can be removed easily during an outpatient procedure before it is a serious problem," Roberts said.

KIDS' NUTRITION Q & A

Nutrition tips for kids

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Q. My toddler refuses to drink milk, but she loves cheese, yogurt, and ice cream. How can I be sure she is getting enough calcium?

A. Each cup of milk or yogurt or 1 or 1-1/2 ounces of natural cheese contains approximately 300 milligrams of calcium. The recommended dietary allowance for children ages 1-10 is 800 milligrams.

If your child refuses to drink milk, try to incorporate it into some of the foods you cook, such as soups, puddings and made-from-scratch macaroni and cheese.

Cooked vegetables, like mustard greens and broccoli, contain about 50-80 milligrams of calcium in each half cup; however, vegetables contain varying amounts of calcium and may not be readily absorbed by the body.

Canned fish products contain substantial amounts of calcium. One sardine contains 90 milligrams of calcium, while one ounce of salmon contains 60 milligrams.

Other unexpected sources of calcium include tortillas made with lime which contain 40 milligrams each and tofu which contains about 30 milligrams per ounce.

Children go through stages where they refuse to drink milk. Here's a little tip: Kids will be more likely to drink milk if they see mom and dad make it a part of their diets.

Q. How long should a mother breastfeed her child?

(See Nutrition, Page 14)

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