

Mrs. M: Are there any other tests?

Doctor: A mammogram (x-ray of the breasts) can also be done. But this is done only in some women after a discussion with their doctor.

Mrs. M: What if the test shows I have cancer?

Doctor: If that should happen, then you and I will talk about what our next steps will be.

Steps to help prevent cancer in women:

- Stay away from all forms of tobacco.
- Exercise regularly, and eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables. This will help prevent some cancers and some other medical problems as well.
- Get regular screenings for cancers of the breast and cervix.
- Report any symptoms or changes in your health to your doctor. Not all symptoms are related to cancer. Do not feel too shy or scared to talk about these symptoms.

Let's Talk about Cancer Screening



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Doctor: Good evening, Mrs. M. How are you?

Mrs. M: I am fine, thank you. Now that I am 40, I thought I should get my yearly check-up for blood pressure and diabetes.

Doctor: Don't forget cancer screening tests also.

Mrs. M: Cancer? Why should I get checked for it? I don't use tobacco in any form, I exercise regularly, I feel fit and fine, and nobody in my family has had cancer. Why should I get tests for cancer?

Doctor: I know you lead a healthy life and that nobody in your family has had cancer, but that does not mean that you may never get cancer. All types of cancer have been found in people who have good habits and no family history.

Mrs. M: What should I do?

Doctor: You should continue your healthy lifestyle and have regular screening tests. These tests can help find problems before cancer develops. The tests can also find cancers in a very early stage when there is more effective treatment.

Mrs. M: I have heard that if you get these screening tests done, you are likely to find cancer. I am worried about finding something wrong in these tests.

Doctor: Screening does not increase the risk of cancer. The tests used today for screening have been tested over several years, and they do not increase the risk of cancer. By screening a patient, we can actually find a problem before it becomes cancer.

Mrs. M: That is encouraging! So may I get screened for all cancers?

Doctor: Effective screening tests are available for the most common cancers in women in India – breast cancer and cervical cancer.

Mrs. M: What are these screening tests?

Doctor: For breast cancer, you should do a self-breast examination. Look at your breasts in front of the mirror, and examine your breasts every month. Do this about one week after your menses when your breasts are less likely to be tender. With this exam, you are feeling and looking for changes in your breasts –such as a lump that was not there last month, a change in the size of a breast, dimpling of the skin, rash, or redness. If you find any changes, tell your doctor. You should also get a breast examination by your family physician or gynecologist every year. A doctor is trained to detect problems in your breast.

Mrs. M: That sounds easy enough. I can start these tests now.

Doctor: We can test for cervical cancer with a Pap test. A Pap test can find precancerous changes that can be treated easily and this will prevent a cervical cancer. It can also find cancer in an early stage.

Mrs. M: Does it hurt?

Doctor: It is not painful. In this test, a sample is taken from the outer part of the cervix (the lowermost part of the uterus) with a wooden or plastic spatula. The sample is spread on glass slides and then examined under a microscope by a pathologist. If he finds a problem, he may suggest other tests. If everything is fine, you need to repeat the test every year. If the test is normal for 3 years, then you can have the Pap test less often.

Mrs. M: How much do these screening tests cost?

Doctor: A breast exam by your doctor will be part of the cost for your visit. A Pap test will cost about Rs 200/-.