

Hey there, beautiful! 🌈 Before you dive in, a quick heads-up: this transcript is a super close-to-verbatim buddy from our podcast, but it's got its quirks! We didn't call the grammar cops on it, so you might bump into a typo or two. But hey, that just adds character, right? 😊 Embrace the wild side of language and enjoy the read! Happy exploring! 🚀



The SHOCKING Reason You Need HPV Pap Tests Every 3 or 5 Years

Carmen Hecox: What I wish I had known when I was 21. Ever wonder why your gynecologist only does a PAP test every three years or in some cases does both a PAP and an HPV test every five years?

So last October, my gynecologist gave me a choice. I can either get a PAP test done that day or get both a PAP and an HPV test done every five years. So, she asked me to choose, but didn't explain why I was being given this choice. So, my response was, sure, whatever.

My first thought was, it's because I'm no longer in my childbearing years, so, I'm no longer important. But is that statement really true?

So why was I given this choice and what does this all mean? Why is she giving me a choice now when she didn't give me one last year? And my prior OB-GYN never asked me to choose. What changed other than my age and the fact that my lab work confirms that I'm postmenopausal?

Research and Cervical Health Awareness

Carmen Hecox: So, I decided to research the answer to this question, and what I discovered in my research is that January is Cervical Health Awareness Month. So, I decided to share my research with you and hopefully share some information perhaps you did not know or maybe refresh your memory.

Cervical Cancer Screening Guidelines

Carmen Hecox: So how often should women have cervical cancer screenings, and which tests should they have done? As per the U. S. Prevention Service Task Force, screenings should begin at age 21 regardless of when you first started having sex. How often and which tests you should have depends on your age and health history. Women aged 21 to 29 should have a Pap test done every three years. HPV testing alone can be considered for women 25 through 29, but PAP tests are preferred.

Women aged 30 to 65 have three options: you can have a PAP and an HPV test done every five years, a PAP done every three years, and an HPV test done every five years.

The reason these tests are done every three to five years is that studies have shown that cervical cancer takes 10 to 20 years to develop. Therefore, frequent testing is not required.

Factors Affecting Pap Tests

Carmen Hecox: What can interfere with a pap test? Your cycle. The best time is in the middle of your menstrual cycle, that's typically around the time you start to ovulate. So, if your menstrual cycle is 28 days long, try to schedule it around the 14th day. If your cycle is shorter, count 14 days from the first day of your last period.

Other things that can conflict with a PAP exam is using products such as vaginal creams, tampons, jellies, medicine, or spermological foam for 3 2 days before, douching 2 3 days before your exam, having sex within 48 hours, and of course, infections.

When to Stop Cervical Cancer Screenings

Carmen Hecox: When should you stop getting cervical cancer screenings? When a woman is 65 years or older, if they do not have a history of moderate or severe abnormal cervical cells or cervical cancer, and if they have had three negative PAP tests results in a row, two negative HPV tests in a row within the past 10 years, and the most recent test should have been performed within three to five years, depending on the type of test. But always have this discussion with your OB-GYN.

Special Cases and Additional Information

Carmen Hecox: If you've had a hysterectomy, do you still need screening? And it depends on whether the cervix was removed and why the hysterectomy was needed and whether there is a history of severe cervical cell changes or cervical cancer. Please follow up with your doctor for additional information.

Do I still need screening if I'm not having sex? The answer to that is yes. HPV can spread without intercourse, and I'll just leave it at that.

Although HPV is the main cause of cervical cancer, it's not the only cause. There are other factors, so please schedule your screening.

Do I still need to see my OB-GYN every year if cervical cancer is no longer recommended? And the answer to that is yes, as they will conduct a pelvic exam, clinical breast exams, and are experts in addressing other women's health conditions, such as menopause, osteoporosis, diabetes, and heart disease.

And here's another reason why you should visit your OB-GYN versus your primary doctor. Because as one of my prior guests mentioned that while she was in medical school, she recalls having one to two lectures about menopause. And I'll be honest with you, getting my annual pelvic exam isn't something I look forward to, but since it's such an important exam, I'd rather get it done by an expert.

By the way, the doctor I mentioned is Dr. Val Cacho, who is a sleep medicine doctor. If you care to learn more about Dr. Val, I'd recommend you watch or listen to this episode, [Sleep Expert Reveals Midlife Sleep Solutions Nobody Knows](#).

Symptoms and Misconceptions about Cervical Cancer

Carmen Hecox: Common symptoms of cervical cancer, vaginal bleeding after intercourse, between periods, or after menopause. Menstrual bleeding that is heavier and longer lasting than usual. Watery, bloody vaginal discharge that may be heavy and have a foul odor. Pelvic pain or pain during intercourse.

And believe it or not, this came as quite a shock to me.

Ovarian Cancer Awareness

Carmen Hecox: But when you get your annual pelvic exam, it does not rule out ovarian cancer. All these years, I honestly believed that my annual gynecological exam covered examining my entire reproductive system.

According to the American Cancer Society, during a pelvic exam, health care providers can feel the uterus, the ovaries for size, shape, and consistency. And the pelvic exam can be useful because it can find some cancers at an early stage, but most early ovarian tumors are difficult or impossible to feel. Therefore, it's important to tell your gynecologist if you have any of the following symptoms. bloating, pelvic or abdominal pain, trouble eating or feeling full quickly, a frequent need to urinate, fatigue, upset stomach, back pain, pain during sex, changes in your cycle such as heavier bleeding than normal or irregular bleeding, abdominal swelling with weight loss.

If all of the above symptoms have lasted more than 12 times in a month, please contact your doctor immediately so they can conduct additional testing and begin treatment if necessary.

Do yourself and me a favor, don't ignore the symptoms I mentioned or wait for them to go away. Contact your doctor so you can begin to get answers.

Causes and Prevention of Cervical Cancer

Carmen Hecox: What causes cervical cancer? Long lasting infections such as HPV. There are certain types of HPV infections that are higher risk, that is HPV 16 and HPV 18, cause 70 percent of cervical cancers worldwide.

Nearly all people who are sexually active will become infected with HPV at some point in their lives, but most HPV infections do go away on their own within a year or two.

According to the American Cancer Association, about 13,820 new cases of invasive cervical cancer will be diagnosed, and about 4,360 women will die from cervical cancer.

The American Cancer Association also states that cervical precancers are being diagnosed and treated early as opposed to invasive cervical cancer, and that's primarily due to regular screening. Cervical cancer is more frequently diagnosed in women between the ages of 35 and 44, with the average being 50.

Here's another interesting fact. More than 20 percent of cervical cancers are found in women over the age of 65, and that's primarily because many health guidelines stop routine cervical cancer screenings at that age.

Another reason is due to women who may have not had consistent screenings throughout their lives or have had a history of abnormal results.

So how can we prevent cervical cancer? Schedule your annual gynecological wellness exam. Get your Pap and HPV screening completed every three to five years. Don't smoke and always practice safe sex.

Final Thoughts and Call to Action

Carmen Hecox: So why am I sharing this information with you? Because as Dr. John Lewis said in last week's episode, "[Improve Your Health And Live a Longer Life.](#)" it is our responsibility to take control of our own health so we can become better and stronger versions of ourselves. And because believe it or not, I care about you because you mean the world to me. And because I want you to be healthy, because we have so much work to do.

If you want to listen or watch more of Dr. Lewis's insights, click right here. If you want additional information, head on over to createthebestme.com/ep099.

And don't forget to come back next week as I will be celebrating my hundredth episode, and I will be sharing lots of wonderful insights I've learned from a couple of key guests.

So don't forget, hit subscribe and share this episode with your girlfriends because we need to spread the importance about cervical health awareness.

Thank you for watching. Catch you next week. Bye for now.