

## Taking Steps to Prevent Cervical Cancer

Did you know that, according to the American Cancer Society, approximately 12,000 American women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer this year, and approximately 4,000 will lose their lives to it?

January is Cervical Health Awareness Month and OAOHN would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to care for yourself, and your loved ones, by reminding you of the importance of preventive care.

Thankfully, disease prevention begins with a variety of factors including understanding the risks. According to the National Cancer Institute, risk factors for cervical cancer include:

- **Lack of regular Pap tests** - The Pap test helps doctors find precancerous cells. Treating precancerous cervical cells often prevents cancer.
- **Weakened immune system** - Women with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection or women who take drugs that suppress the immune system have a higher-than-average risk.
- **Age** - Cancer of the cervix occurs most often in women over 40.
- **Exposure to the human papillomavirus (HPV)** - Women who have had a higher-than-average risk of HPV infection have a higher risk of developing cervical cancer.
- **Smoking cigarettes** - Women with an HPV infection who smoke cigarettes have a higher risk of cervical cancer than women with HPV infection who do not smoke.
- **Using birth control pills for a long time** - Using birth control pills for five or more years may increase the risk of cervical cancer among women with HPV infection.
- **Having many children** - Studies suggest that giving birth to many children may increase the risk of cervical cancer among women with HPV infection.
- **Diethylstilbestrol (DES) exposure** - DES may increase the risk of a rare form of cervical cancer in females exposed to this drug before birth. DES was given to some pregnant women in the United States between about 1940 and 1971.

While controlling physical risk factors is obviously a great way to help prevent any disease, so is maintaining a healthy spirit. For example:

- **Remaining optimistic.** Research shows that happiness and a positive attitude are associated with lower rates of disease.
- **Controlling stress.** Stress relievers like deep breathing and muscle relaxation exercises and keeping a journal, can be helpful in controlling the impact stress has on your body.
- **Doing everything in moderation.** Don't try to do too much at one time – make sure to have time for proper nutrition, sleep, work and play.
- **Creating a network.** Maintaining a close circle of family and friends can provide you with emotional support when you need it.

Lastly, getting annual physicals and tests from your Primary Care Physician (PCP) is key in sustaining your health and helping prevent diseases. Finding a PCP is easy! Just visit your insurance carrier's website, look for the "find a doctor" area and follow the instructions.