

# Diseases of the Reproductive System

A **reproductive system disease** is any condition that affects the male or female reproductive system. There are many causes of reproductive system disease including genetic and congenital abnormalities, abnormal hormone production, functional disorders of the genitalia, infections, and tumors. Some diseases

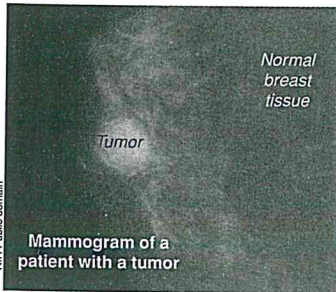
only affect fertility (e.g. erectile dysfunction), while others, such as infections and tumors, can be life threatening. Cancers can affect any part of the reproductive system and may spread (metastasize) from there to other tissues and organs. Some common reproductive system diseases are described below.

## Cancers of the Female and Male Reproductive System

Reproductive cancers affect the reproductive organs. The incidence of some cancers can be reduced by making certain lifestyle choices (e.g. not smoking), but some risk factors, including age and genetic makeup) are uncontrollable. Early detection of any cancer enables early treatment and this improves survival rates.

### Female Reproductive Cancers

- ▶ **Breast cancer** (below) is the most common form of cancer in females. There is a hereditary factor: 5-10% of cases are caused by the inheritance of a gene mutation.



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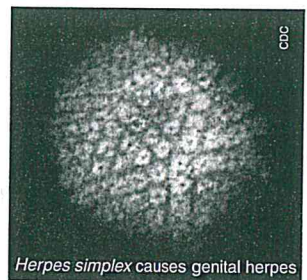
- ▶ **Uterine (endometrial) cancer** originates in the lining of the uterus (the endometrium). A hysterectomy (surgery to remove the uterus) is usually required.
- ▶ **Ovarian cancer** kills more women than any other gynecological cancer because the symptoms often are not detected until the cancer is quite advanced.
- ▶ **Cervical cancer** is strongly linked with having a human papillomavirus (HPV) infection. An HPV vaccine is available to young teenage girls and may help to reduce incidence rates.

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### Sexually Transmitted Infections

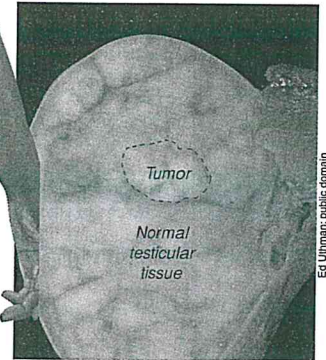
Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are passed on by unprotected sexual activity, and infect both male and females. Some STIs are caused by bacteria (e.g. gonorrhoea and chlamydia) and can be treated with antibiotics, but viral infections (such as genital herpes and HIV) have no cure. Some STIs can be difficult to detect because they have no symptoms. If left untreated, STIs can cause a number of related health problems (e.g. cystitis), **infertility** (by damaging the reproductive organs), or death.



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### Male Reproductive Cancers

- ▶ **Prostate cancer** is a slow growing tumor on the prostate gland, and mainly affects men over 40. It can be difficult to detect because it does not produce any symptoms until it becomes large enough to impair the urinary system.
- ▶ **Penile cancer**, cancer of the penis, has a survival rate of 65% if detected early. The cause of penile cancer is unknown, but poor genital hygiene and a history of STIs are known risk factors.



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- ▶ **Testicular cancer** (above) usually occurs in young men aged 15-35. It is highly treatable and curable.

1. Routine screening programs are available for some types of cancers (e.g. cervical cancer and breast cancer). Why is the early detection of cancer important?

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2. Why are ovarian cancer in women and prostate cancer in men more likely to kill than any types of reproductive cancer?

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