

Mayo Clinic Q & A - Dr. Kristina Butler - Endometrial cancer...

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uterine cancer, women, kristina, mayo clinic, uterus, patients, abnormal, gynecologic oncologist, disparities, rise, important, yearly checkup, risk factors, comfortable, increased, diabetes, higher rates, menopausal, menopause, finding

SPEAKERS

Dr. Halena Gazelka, Dr. Kristina Butler, Narrator

N Narrator 00:00
Coming up on Mayo Clinic Q&A...

D Dr. Kristina Butler 00:02
So we do see a rise in diagnosis of uterine cancer. And we feel like that is because there's also a rise of some other illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. And because we're seeing more women experience those types of illnesses. Those are the type of factors for also uterine cancers.

N Narrator 00:23
The rise in death rates from uterine cancer has revealed racial disparities, but there are steps women of all races and ethnicities can take to lower their risk of uterine cancer.

D Dr. Kristina Butler 00:34
Just overall wellness. So doing your best to avoid having diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and also continuing to follow with your gynecologist for a yearly checkup is very helpful.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 00:49
Welcome, everyone to Mayo Clinic Q&A. I'm your host, Dr. Halena Gazelka. The number of people who die from uterine cancer is increasing particularly among black women. Also called endometrial cancer. uterine cancer begins in the layer of cells that forms the lining of the

uterus. Researchers recently reported that death rates for all types of uterine cancer increased significantly each year from 2010 to 2017. The study also revealed racial disparities in uterine cancer death rates with higher death rates among Hispanic, Black, and Asian women than among white women. Joining us to discuss why more people are dying of uterine cancer is Dr. Kristina Butler, a gynecologic oncologist at Mayo Clinic in Arizona. Welcome, Kristina.

D Dr. Kristina Butler 01:39

Thank you so much, Halena, I'm so happy to be here.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 01:42

I think this is such an important topic for us to talk about, because there are good measures to prevent and treat uterine cancer. But before we start, could I ask you a personal question? How did you become interested in this field of medicine?

D Dr. Kristina Butler 01:56

From the very beginning in medical school, I was so interested in women's health, I find women to be wonderful patients. They are very often the strength of the family, taking care of everyone and making sure everyone's you know, okay, and they're very motivated patients to remain healthy and have a long life so that they can enjoy their family and be helpful members of the community. So, women's health is a beautiful career.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 02:24

So, what is uterine cancer, Kristina?

D Dr. Kristina Butler 02:27

So, the uterus is a pear-shaped organ that sits deep in a woman's pelvis. It allows her to have pregnancy, childbirth, and then a normal menstrual cycle throughout her younger years. And as a woman ages, the menopause experience kind of quiets the uterus. But that's when we notice the increased incidence of uterine cancer. So abnormal mutations can happen in this small structure, and then they can lead to a woman being diagnosed with uterine cancer.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 03:01

And what do we know about what causes uterine cancer?

D Dr. Kristina Butler 03:06

I think that there are some risk factors we're well aware of. We do see some increased

diagnosis of certain comorbidities, and women that experience uterine cancer. And those include diabetes, hypertension, and also an elevated body mass index. So, when a woman's weight exceeds what's normal for her height, that too can be a risk factor for uterine cancer. It's very important that women stay attuned to their bodies, so that if they do have menopausal bleeding, they have that evaluated. And we don't hear a lot about that. But I think it's a really nice opportunity for women to know, if I have any bleeding after menopause, it's so important that I get checked out quickly. And not ignore that, because that can be that first sign of something abnormal happening in the uterus. Fortunately, the uterus is connected to the vagina so that very often a woman will experience symptoms of the cancer so that it can be detected early.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 04:14

Kristina, what is known about the higher incidence of uterine cancer cases and then higher rates of death as well?

D Dr. Kristina Butler 04:25

Yeah, that's a great question, Halena. So we do see a rise in diagnosis of uterine cancer. And we feel like that is because there's also a rise of some other illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. And because we're seeing more women experienced those types of illnesses, those are the type of factors being risk factors for also uterine cancer. So we do see a rise. Now, for reasons we don't fully understand, we also see a rise in certain very aggressive subtypes of uterine cancer. They're the less common subtypes. But when they do occur, they have higher death rates. And we've seen those increase for reasons that we don't fully understand, particularly in Hispanic communities. And also women that are Black are more often to have that diagnosis as well.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 05:23

Do we know anything about what is causing the disparities that cause some ethnic groups to have higher rates of uterine cancer and higher death rates?

D Dr. Kristina Butler 05:33

I think we do. And this is a huge priority of the national organization, the Society of Gynecologic Oncology. I think it's very clear that there are disparities as it relates to patient access to care. Also, opportunities to train providers in cultural competency, so that patients feel very comfortable coming and having that patient doctor relationship. We also need to improve health care access for women and rural communities, and also take education to those communities so that those women feel comfortable reaching out when they find something that's not going well.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 06:18

And Kristina, what can women of any race or ethnicity do to reduce their risk of developing uterine cancer?

D Dr. Kristina Butler 06:27

Reducing your risk of uterine cancer, I think is just overall wellness in general again, so doing your best to avoid having diabetes, hypertension, obesity. And also continuing to follow with your gynecologist for a yearly checkup is very helpful. That's recommended by the American College of Gynecology on a yearly basis for women. And then again, listening to your body so that if you have bleeding after menopause, you get checked out. If you're pre-menopausal, and you have heavy bleeding, and you know, don't understand why, please get checked out and feel comfortable finding a doctor that you feel safe talking with and having those intimate discussions.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 07:14

And speaking of that, Kristina, how does an individual know if they have selected the right physician?

D Dr. Kristina Butler 07:21

Yeah, that's a tough one. I think that there are many physicians available and finding someone that you feel comfortable with is key because you have to have open communication. But then, also, I think being mindful of the type of institution that you're going to so that if you have an opportunity to go to a National Cancer Institute for cancer diagnosis, that we've we know that women have improved outcomes when they go to nationally accredited institutes, because these institutes tend to follow guidelines and provide the best evidence-based practice for women.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 08:00

It makes perfect sense. Kristina, anything else you'd like to share with our listeners today?

D Dr. Kristina Butler 08:05

I think it's important for all women to just remain strong. Listen to your body. Advocate for yourself and know that we are here to help you. Finding a facility where you feel comfortable presenting for something abnormal or just having a great relationship with someone with those yearly checkups so that we can keep you healthy, sustain good quality of life and also longevity.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 08:30

Thank you so much for being here today. Kristina.

D Dr. Kristina Butler 08:33
Thank you. My pleasure.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 08:35
Our thanks to Mayo Clinic gynecologic oncologist, Dr. Kristina Butler, for being here with us today to discuss uterine cancer. I hope that you learn something. I know that I did and wish each of you a very wonderful day.

N Narrator 08:50
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