

OVARIAN CANCER

What You Need To Know About

The sooner ovarian cancer is found and treated, the better a woman's chance for recovery. But ovarian cancer is hard to detect early. Many times, women with ovarian cancer have no symptoms or just mild symptoms until the disease is in an advanced stage.

There are many types of tumors that can start in the ovaries. Ovarian cysts are examples of other growths that can occur on the ovaries. Most ovarian cysts are not cancerous. They are fluid-filled sacs that form on the surface of the ovary. Cysts usually go away without treatment, but a doctor may recommend removal, especially if it seems to be growing, to ensure that they do not become cancerous.

- About 1 in every 57 women in the United States will develop ovarian cancer. Most cases occur in women over the age of 50, but this disease can also affect younger women.

WHO'S AT RISK

The exact causes of ovarian cancer are not known. However, studies show that the following factors increase the chance of developing this disease:

- Family history. First-degree relatives (mother, daughter, sister) of a woman who has had ovarian cancer are at increased risk of developing this type of cancer themselves.
- Age- the likelihood of developing ovarian cancer increases as a woman gets older
- Childbearing – Women who have never had children
- Personal history – Women who have had breast or colon cancer
- Gene Mutation – Studies show that inheriting a defect in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene can also increase a woman's risk 13 to 50 percent.
- *Fertility drugs* – Drugs that cause a woman to ovulate may slightly increase chance of developing ovarian cancer.
- Living in an industrialized country.
- Talc – Some studies suggest that women who have used talc in the genital area for many years may be at increased risk
- *Hormone replacement therapy (HRT)* – Some evidence suggest that women who use HRT after menopause may have a slightly increased risk

Having one or more of the risk factors mentioned here does not mean that a woman is sure to develop ovarian cancer, but the chances may be higher than average.

SYMPTOMS MAY INCLUDE:

- General abdominal discomfort and /or pain (gas, indigestion, pressure, swelling, bloating, cramps)
- Nausea, diarrhea, constipation, or frequent urination
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling of fullness even after a light meal
- Weight gain or loss with no known reason
- Abnormal bleeding from the vagina

These symptoms may be caused by ovarian cancer or by other, less serious conditions. It is important to check with the doctor about any of these symptoms. To help find the cause of symptoms, a doctor evaluates a woman's medical history. The doctor also performs a physical exam and orders diagnostic tests.

- Pelvic exam
- Ultrasound
- CA-125 assay is a blood test for the tumor marker, often in higher-than-normal amounts in the blood of women with ovarian cancer.
- Genetic testing – Two main susceptibility genes for breast and ovarian cancer have been identified: BRCA1 and BRCA2. Determination of who should have testing is based largely on the family history or pedigree.

Though ovarian cancer is less common than breast cancer – there are about 26,000 new cases each year nationwide – It is much deadlier. There are about 16,000 deaths from the disease each year.

This synopsis article was taken from the National Cancer Institute, National Ovarian Cancer Coalition and National Ovarian Cancer Association..

Learn More about Ovarian Cancer

- National Cancer Institute – booklet (NIH Publication No 00-1561) – www.cancer.gov 1-800-4-CANCER
- American Cancer Society – www.cancer.org – 1-800-ACS-2345
- National Ovarian Cancer Coalition – www.ovarian.org
- National Ovarian Cancer Association – www.ovariancanada.org -