



Ovarian Cancer Fact Sheet

Cancers that start in the ovaries are called ovarian cancer. In the US, the number of ovarian cancer cases has slowly dropped. But it is still the fifth-leading cause of cancer death in women. The most common types of ovarian cancer are called epithelial tumors. This cancer happens most often in women over age 60. It is more common in white women than African American women.

Risk Factors and Prevention

Several risk factors are known to increase a woman's chance for epithelial ovarian cancer. These include: a woman's age; heavier body weight; never having children; using hormone therapy after menopause; personal history of endometriosis or pelvic inflammatory disease; and having a personal or family history of breast, ovarian, or colorectal cancer. Women who have an inherited gene mutation or family cancer syndrome, such as *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* or Lynch syndrome, also have an increased risk for breast cancer.

There are no known ways to prevent most ovarian cancers. Women with a family history or inherited mutations might benefit from meeting with a certified genetic counselor to better understand their risk and help them make informed decisions about their care.

Early Detection

For now, there are no good screening tests for ovarian cancer. Only about 20% of ovarian cancers are found at an early stage. Knowing your family history and other risk factors, getting regular pelvic exams, and reporting any symptoms you have to your doctor right away are the best ways to find ovarian cancer early. Women should talk to their health care provider about having routine pelvic exams and about their risk for ovarian cancer.

Signs and Symptoms

Some signs and symptoms might include:

- Abdominal (belly) swelling or bloating, sometimes with weight loss
- Trouble eating or feeling full quickly
- Belly or back pain
- Fatigue
- Feeling like you need to empty your bladder all the time or having to go often
- Pain during sex
- Changes in periods, such as heavier or irregular bleeding

Treatment

Treatment for ovarian cancer depends on the type and stage (how big the cancer is and if it has spread) and the results of any testing done on the tumor. A woman's age, other health problems, and personal choices are also considered. Women with ovarian cancer should learn about all treatment options and their possible side effects, so they can make informed decisions with their doctors.

Living With Ovarian Cancer

From the time a woman is told she has ovarian cancer, her quality of life is affected. Physical, social, psychological, spiritual, and financial issues can come up at any time during and after treatment. For instance, women with ovarian cancer might have concerns about their sex life or whether they can have children in the future.

Some types of ovarian cancers can be serious. People with advanced ovarian cancer may be helped by palliative care at any time after diagnosis. Palliative care focuses on helping people improve their quality of life and cope with issues they may have when living with a serious illness.

Good communication between a woman with ovarian cancer and her health care team is important. This should include:

- Asking and answering questions
- Working together to set care goals
- Making shared decisions
- Managing side effects and other issues
- Making sure to schedule follow-up tests and care



To learn more, visit www.cancer.org/cancer/ovarian-cancer.html.