

# Ovarian Cancer:

Is your body trying to tell you something?  
Know the symptoms!

[www.ovarian.org.uk](http://www.ovarian.org.uk)

If detected early, survival rates are high.

 **Ovarian**<sup>®</sup>  
cancer action

# What is ovarian cancer?

Ovarian cancer only affects women. Ovaries nestle deep inside women's bodies, near the womb or uterus, and are home to the eggs that she releases in her childbearing years. It's important that women are aware of their ovaries, not just during their fertile years, but beyond too.

Although women can develop ovarian cancer at any age, it is most common in those who have gone through the menopause. There are around 6,800 new cases in the UK each year.

Most women do not know any of the symptoms of ovarian cancer, and often mistakenly believe a smear test will detect it (this is for cervical cancer).

Ovarian cancer is easiest to treat when it has not spread beyond the ovaries, so it is important that women visit their doctor if they experience any of the common symptoms on most days.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, remember it is unlikely to be ovarian cancer, however if symptoms persist it is important that you consult your doctor.

## Symptoms of ovarian cancer

If you experience any of the following key symptoms on most days of the month, then ask your doctor if they have considered ovarian cancer.

- **persistent pelvic and stomach pain**
- **increased stomach size / persistent bloating**
  - **not bloating that comes and goes**
- **difficulty eating and feeling full quickly**

Research shows that these symptoms, when very frequent, can help a doctor distinguish between ovarian cancer and other less serious conditions e.g. irritable bowel syndrome.

Any other sudden onset, frequently recurring or numerous symptoms should also be reported to your doctor  
Other symptoms of ovarian cancer can include

- **needing to wee suddenly or more often**
- **change in bowel habits**
- **excessive tiredness**
  - **back pain**

# Risk factors

**Your risk of developing ovarian cancer can depend on a number of factors. The two most important are:**

**Age:** As with almost all cancers, your risk increases with age. Most cases occur in women over the age of 50, though it can occur at any age from late teens onwards.

**Family history:** Cancer sometimes runs in families. Most women with just one relative who has ovarian cancer will not be at an increased risk of developing the disease themselves. However around 15% of cases (1000 per year) are linked to inherited genes that have become altered (e.g. BRCA 1 & 2). In these families there may be several cases of ovarian cancer and sometimes breast cancer too. If you have two or more close relatives on one side of your family with these cancers, let your GP know. Some communities such as Jewish or Polish have a higher incidence of the altered BRCA1 & 2 genes. More rarely, ovarian cancer can be linked to the HNPCC gene with cases of bowel, kidney, stomach and/or endometrium (lining of the womb) cancer occurring within a family.

**Other factors** can increase your risk of developing ovarian cancer, but not as strongly. They include being overweight, not having children, not having breast fed, or not using the oral contraceptive pill over a number of years. Some recent studies have shown a small increase in risk from using Hormone Replacement Therapy.

## Reducing your risk

It is important to develop and maintain a healthy lifestyle by eating plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, taking regular exercise and not drinking too much alcohol. This will help to reduce your risk for many cancers. There are a number of ways of reducing risk for women at high risk of ovarian cancer (because of their family history), such as taking the oral contraceptive pill, or undergoing surgery, but these must be discussed with a doctor.

## Are you concerned about symptoms?

If you are worried about symptoms, then why not use our symptom diary to help describe to your doctor, what is happening to you. Remember these symptoms can occur for many reasons, and your doctor is unlikely to want to refer you for unnecessary tests. But if symptoms are persistent and very frequent, having started for no apparent reason, make sure ovarian cancer is considered. Your doctor will only see around one case of ovarian cancer every five years, so it is not surprising that it can sometimes go overlooked. Download our diary from [www.ovarian.org.uk/pdf/SymptomDiary.pdf](http://www.ovarian.org.uk/pdf/SymptomDiary.pdf) or call **020 8238 7605** for a copy.

# Talking to your doctor:



Make a list of your concerns as your mind can go blank when you feel under pressure.



Try and give your doctor as much detail on your symptoms as possible. Include the range of symptoms, how often you have them, and the impact they are having on your daily life. You could use the symptom diary for this, which you can download from [www.ovarian.org.uk/pdf/SymptomDiary.pdf](http://www.ovarian.org.uk/pdf/SymptomDiary.pdf)



Tell your doctor if anyone else in your family has had breast or ovarian cancer. Sometimes cancer can run in families.



If you are worried about ovarian cancer tell your doctor. They would rather you spoke up than suffered in silence.



If your doctor reassures you but you are still uncertain, ask them why they think everything is normal.



Don't be embarrassed to go back again or ask to see another doctor if you don't feel any better. Perhaps even show them this leaflet.



*“Overcoming my fear and speaking to someone meant they caught the cancer... don't suffer in silence”*

Shehnaz

## What happens if your GP sends you for tests?

Your GP may decide to send you for a ‘tvu’ – an internal ultrasound scan showing the ovaries. This is not a painful procedure, though some women say they find it a bit uncomfortable. Your GP may also send you for a blood test to measure the levels of a protein, called CA125. This may even be repeated over time. It is not a conclusive test, and levels can be raised for a number of reasons. If you are uncertain at any stage about tests or results, ask your GP. If you are suspected of having ovarian cancer and need to undergo surgery, it is important that this is done at a specialist centre by experienced surgeons. This has been shown through research to give you the best chance of successful treatment.

# Ovarian Cancer Action is dedicated to improving survival rates of ovarian cancer by

## funding research

advancing and supporting research into the prevention, detection, treatment and cure of ovarian cancer. Based at Imperial College, London, the Ovarian Cancer Action Research Centre is now Europe's largest group of specialist researchers for the disease. We also fund projects outside the centre and have recently been awarded membership of the prestigious Association of Medical Research Charities.

## raising awareness

of the symptoms and risk factors of the disease, both amongst women, high risk communities and healthcare professionals. We have appointed the UK's first Healthcare Project Manager for ovarian cancer working with women, GPs, nurses and hospital specialists to reduce delays in diagnosis, and improve the accuracy of referrals.

## giving a voice

to women with ovarian cancer. Helping them to bring about improvements in services, raise awareness of symptoms in their local area, and campaign for action at a national level.



# Where can you find more information



## Ovarian Cancer Action

[www.ovarian.org.uk](http://www.ovarian.org.uk) 020 8238 7605 [info@ovarian.org.uk](mailto:info@ovarian.org.uk)

We offer a range of materials including awareness raising kits, information for women at high risk of ovarian cancer, patient resource packs, newsletter and fundraising materials. The website has up to date information on ovarian cancer and its treatment.

## Cancerbackup

[www.cancerbackup.org.uk](http://www.cancerbackup.org.uk) 0808 800 1234 (freephone)

Mon-Fri 9am-8pm. Trained nurses can answer your questions about family history, symptoms, diagnosis, or treatments.

## Dipex

[www.dipex.org](http://www.dipex.org)

Watch, listen or read other people's experiences of ovarian cancer.

## Ovacom

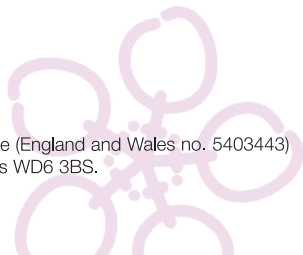
[www.ovacom.org.uk](http://www.ovacom.org.uk) 0845 371 0554

Patient support group for women with ovarian cancer.

**This leaflet contains information that is vital for every woman to know. Please share it with your mother, sister, grandmother, aunts, cousins, nieces and girlfriends, and call us for further copies if needed.**

Please use the tear off slip to let us know how you have used this leaflet, and provide any feedback you have about the information it contains. You can send it to us FREE OF CHARGE, by posting it to the following address:

FREEPOST RLUL-LJRE-AKSC  
Ovarian Cancer Action  
Bush House  
The Waterfront  
Elstree Road  
ee  
Hertfordshire  
WD6 3BS



## I have used your leaflet in the following way

(tick as necessary)

- To improve my knowledge about ovarian cancer and its symptoms
- To help raise awareness of ovarian cancer with people I know



To help me talk to my doctor about my symptoms and

- I have been referred for further tests
- I have been reassured, but know to return if they persist
- Other

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## I'd like to make the following comments about the leaflet

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## Please send me

- Information on raising awareness of symptoms in my local area
- Raising funds for our research and awareness projects
- Information for women at high risk of developing ovarian cancer
- The Ovarian Cancer Action patient resource pack
- Your regular newsletter



**Name**.....

**Address**.....  
.....

**Postcode**.....

# PLEASE POST YOUR COMPLETED LEAFLET TO:

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