



After an Ovarian Cancer Diagnosis



Cancer that starts in an ovary is called ovarian cancer. Ovaries are glands found in females that make eggs and hormones. Ovarian cancer may also start in the fallopian tubes that connect the ovaries to the uterus (womb). If you have been told you have ovarian cancer, you've probably already had blood tests, scans, and a biopsy (a test that takes some tissue to check for cancer). Other tests might have been done on the cancer cells to check for certain proteins and gene changes called biomarkers. You might also have other procedures to find out if the cancer has spread. These tests help your doctor know what type of ovarian cancer you have, what stage it is, and what treatment might help.

Treatment for ovarian cancer

Your treatment will depend on the type and stage of the ovarian cancer. Your treatment options will also depend on the results of tests on the cancer cells, your health, and your personal preferences.

Surgery is used to treat most ovarian cancers. This often involves removing the ovaries and the uterus. Surgery to remove the ovaries is called an oophorectomy. Surgery to remove the uterus is called a hysterectomy.

Other treatment for ovarian cancer can include medicines such as chemo, targeted therapy, hormone therapy, and radiation. You may need more than one type of treatment. Your doctor will help you decide which treatments are best for you.

Surgery and some other treatments can cause changes in your menstrual periods. Your periods might stop, even if you haven't gone through menopause. These treatments could also affect your ability to get pregnant, but there may be ways to protect this. It's important to talk to your doctor early, before treatment starts. They can help you understand what to expect.

Be sure to ask:

- What type of ovarian cancer do I have?
- What stage is the ovarian cancer, and what does that mean?
- Will I need more tests?
- What is the goal of treatment?
- What treatment do you think is best for me?
- Will I need surgery? Will my ovaries or uterus be removed?

What to expect before and during treatment

Your cancer care team will explain your treatment plan to you. This team may include different doctors, nurses, and other health care workers, depending on the type of treatment you need. For example, if you need surgery, you will work with a surgeon. They will tell you what to expect before, during, and after the procedure. If you need other types of treatment, your cancer care team will explain how it is given, help you get ready for it, keep track of how you're doing, and help you manage any side effects. You will also get tests at certain times to see how well your treatment is working.

Not everyone going through treatment for ovarian cancer will have the same side effects. For example, a person might have surgery to take out one or both ovaries depending on where the cancer is located. The side effects of this surgery are different from the side effects of chemo, targeted therapy, or hormone therapy. And people getting the same treatment might have different side effects.

Be sure to ask:

- What side effects might I have, and what can I do about them?
- How will we know if the treatment is working?
- How often will I get treatment? How long will it last?
- Where will I get my treatment? Can I drive myself?
- Will I be able to keep doing my usual activities, like work and exercise?
- Will I be able to have children after treatment?
- Will treatment affect my sex life? If so, how and for how long? What can I do to help this?
- Are there any clinical trials that might be right for me?

What to expect after treatment

After treatment, ask your cancer doctor for a treatment summary and follow-up plan. This is called a survivorship care plan. Your cancer doctor will work with your family or primary care doctor to help manage side effects from treatment and check your general health. You will have regular tests to check if your cancer has come back, or to check if a new cancer has started in a different part of your body.

You might be faced with changes to your body after treatment. If you had menstrual periods before surgery, you'll stop having them after your uterus is removed. Your ability to get pregnant will change, too. Treatment might also make your vagina dry. This can cause bleeding or pain during or after sex. Ask your doctor what to expect and let them know if you have any problems.

People who have had ovarian cancer are at risk of having it again or getting certain other types of cancer. Even if you feel fine after finishing treatment, it's important to ask your cancer care team about a regular schedule for follow-up tests to check if your ovarian cancer has come back.

For some people, the cancer might not go away completely. They might continue to get treatment, and tests will still be needed to see how well it's working.

Be sure to ask:

- Where do I get a copy of my treatment summary and follow-up plan?
- How often do I need to see my cancer care team?
- When and how should I contact them?
- Will I need tests to see if my cancer has come back, or to check for problems from my treatment?
- Do I need any screening tests, like a mammogram or colonoscopy, to find other cancers early?
- Are there late or long-term side effects from treatment that I should watch for?
- Where can I find my medical records after treatment?

Staying healthy

Be sure to tell your doctor or cancer care team if any treatment side effects don't go away or if you have any new symptoms.

There are things you can do to keep yourself healthy during and after treatment. Getting to and staying at a healthy weight, eating well, being active, and avoiding alcohol can also help you stay healthy and may lower your risk of getting other cancers.

Ovarian cancer can run in families. Sometimes genetic testing is done to know if you have a type that might be inherited. Talk to your cancer care team to find out if genetic testing is right for you.

Dealing with your feelings

Having ovarian cancer might make you feel scared, sad, or nervous. It's normal to have these feelings, and there are ways to help you cope with them.

- Don't try to deal with your feelings by yourself. Talk about them, no matter what they are.
- It's OK to feel sad or down once in a while, but let your cancer care team know if you have these feelings for more than a few days.
- If your doctor says it's OK, continue doing things you enjoy like spending time outdoors, going to a movie or sporting event, or going out to dinner.
- Get help with tasks like cooking and cleaning.

You might want to reach out to friends, family, or religious leaders or groups. Counseling can also help. Some people find it helpful to talk with others who've been through the same things. A support group can offer that. Tell your cancer care team how you're feeling. They can help you find the right support.



For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/ovariancancer or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.