



# Ovarian Cancer Fact Sheet

## About Ovarian Cancer

Cancers that start in the fallopian tubes or ovaries can be called ovarian cancer. In the US, the number of ovarian cancer cases has slowly dropped, but it is the fifth-leading cause of cancer death in women. The most common types of ovarian cancer are called epithelial tumors. This cancer mainly develops 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 types. These include: a woman's age; being overweight or obese; having children later or never having them; using fertility treatment; using hormone therapy after menopause; having a personal or family history of breast, ovarian, or colorectal cancer; having an inherited genetic mutation or family cancer syndrome, such as *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* or Lynch syndrome.

At this time, there are no known ways to prevent most ovarian cancers. Some patients with a family history or inherited mutations might benefit from meeting with a certified genetic counselor to better understand their risk and help make informed decisions about their care.

## Early Detection

Because there are currently no reliable screening tests, the American Cancer Society does not have recommended screening guidelines for ovarian cancer. Only about 20% of ovarian cancers are found at an early stage. Some ways women can help find it early include knowing family history and other risk factors, getting regular pelvic exams, and seeing a doctor when symptoms are noticed. 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
- Eating or digestive problems (feeling full quickly, having nausea or gas, being constipated)
- Abdominal, pelvic, or back pain
- Fatigue
- Feeling like you need to urinate all the time or having to go often
- Pain during sexual intercourse or other sexual activity
- Changes in menstrual (period) cycles, such as heavier or irregular bleeding

## Treatment

Treatment for ovarian cancer depends on the type and stage of the cancer, special testing that might be done on the tumor, as well as the woman's age, other health problems, and personal choices. Women who are diagnosed with ovarian cancer should discuss all treatment options and make informed treatment decisions together with their doctors.

## Living With Ovarian Cancer

From the time a woman is diagnosed with ovarian cancer, their quality of life is affected in some way. Different physical, social, psychological, spiritual, and financial issues can come up at any time during the cancer experience and after treatment is over. For example, women with ovarian cancer might have concerns about their sex life and whether they can have children in the future.

Some types of ovarian cancers can be serious. Palliative care is focused on helping to improve the quality of life and dealing with issues that people living with a serious illness might have. People with advanced ovarian cancer may benefit from having palliative care at any time from the point of diagnosis, throughout treatment, and beyond.

Good communication between a woman with ovarian cancer and the health care team is important and involves:

- 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](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/ovarian-cancer.html).**



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