

# INROADS INTO OVARIAN CANCER

*The other women's cancer is a silent enemy, but survival rates are improving*

**I**n her 25 years as a gynecologic oncologist, Dr. Carol Brown has observed a sea change in effective treatments for ovarian cancer, thanks to advances in surgery and chemotherapy.

"Instead of it being a death sentence, women are living many years with the disease," says Brown, a gynecologic oncologist at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan. "We have a long way to go, but the new approaches are very exciting."

Ovarian cancer has the highest rate of death of all female gynecologic cancers, because there is no screening tool for the disease and is difficult to detect in its early stages. Yet, says Brown, "I feel very hopeful."

When she first started out, women with ovarian cancer lived about a year to 18 months; now, they can survive up to 10 years, with a cure rate of advanced stages of the disease jumping from 10 to 20 percent a quarter-century ago to 40 to 50 percent today.

"Sometimes, if the cancer comes back, treatments can keep it under wraps," says Brown. "Just like women with breast cancer can live with the disease, women with ovarian cancer can now live with the disease."

The most important thing a woman can do if she has ovarian cancer or suspects she has it? "Get treated by or consult with a specialist," says Brown, "so you can get the right surgery and the right chemotherapy."

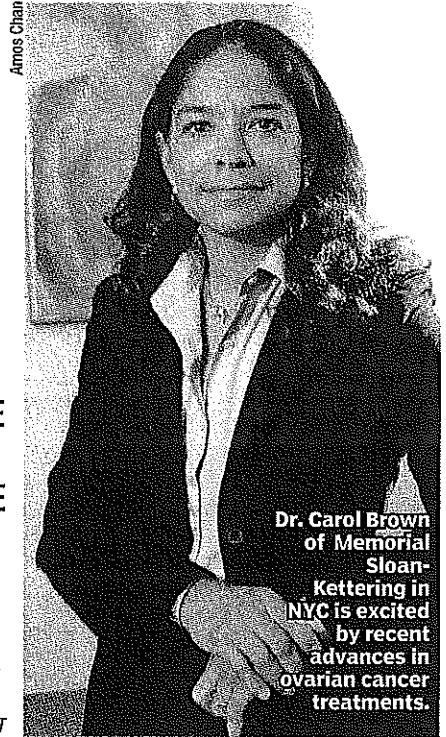
Recent treatment advances include aggressive surgery to remove more of the cancer and new chemotherapy drugs that not only poison the cancer cells but block the blood vessels that feed them.

Scientists have also now figured out how cancer cells work, to the point that if a cancer cell is missing a specific gene function, targeted drugs can be used to replace the function for which that gene was responsible (which



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**Dr. Carol Brown** of Memorial Sloan-Kettering in NYC is excited by recent advances in ovarian cancer treatments.

**TO find a gynecologic oncologist, contact your local hospital's physician help line. Or, contact SHARE (a help group for women with breast or ovarian cancer) at [sharecancersupport.org](http://sharecancersupport.org) (866-891-2392). Their Web site also has a list of symptoms of ovarian cancer in its early stages. Another place to find a specialist is through the Women's Cancer Network ([wcn.org](http://wcn.org)).**

is also causing the cancer). Says Brown: "It's very encouraging."

These two innovative treatments are still in clinical trials but widely available to women with ovarian cancer at many medical centers in the NYC area. If you have a new diagnosis or a recurrence of ovarian cancer, you can find details at [wcn.org](http://wcn.org) or [cancer.gov/clinicaltrials](http://cancer.gov/clinicaltrials).

— Diane Herbst

## Evaluating your risk factors

**WITH no early detection tests yet invented, Brown says the most important thing a woman must know is if she is high risk:**

→ Ten percent of ovarian cancers are inherited. A woman with a relative with ovarian cancer is at

increased risk to carry the altered genes responsible for ovarian cancer — BRCA1 and BRCA2. Ashkenazi Jews carry those genes at a higher rate.

→ Women who have a family history of breast cancer, particularly if it happens at

age 50 or younger, are also at risk. If you have a history of breast cancer yourself or if it's in your family, you should ask your doctor about a genetic test or specialized ultrasound to determine if you are at increased risk.

— Diane Herbst