

DEDICATED EXPERIENCED SUPPORT

SHARE

sharecancersupport.org

Information for Everyone About Ovarian Cancer



Welcome to SHARE!

SHARE is a national nonprofit that supports, educates, and empowers anyone who has been diagnosed with women's cancers, and provides outreach to the general public about signs and symptoms. We are a compassionate community of knowledgeable survivors, women living with cancer, and healthcare professionals. We are ready to listen to your concerns, respond to your questions, and provide education to help you make sense of your diagnosis and treatment.

SHARE is dedicated to serving women of all races, cultures, backgrounds, and identities. Because no one should have to face ovarian cancer alone.

SHARE is here for you and all of our services are free.

Ovarian Cancer: Low risk does not mean no risk.

Ovarian cancer used to be called a 'silent killer' and the disease that whispers. Today we know there are symptoms. And while there is still no proven effective screen to find ovarian cancer early when it is easiest to treat -- knowing your family history, paying attention to persistent symptoms, and bringing them to your doctor's attention could save your life.

The good news is that this cancer is comparatively rare. For example, the chances of an American woman developing breast cancer is one in eight while the chances of a woman at average risk of developing ovarian cancer is one in 78. However, ovarian cancer is most often diagnosed at later stages, when the cancer has spread and is more challenging to treat.

Did You Know?

- The Pap Smear is not a screen for ovarian cancer. Pap Smear is an effective screen only for cervical cancer.
- If you learn that you are at increased genetic risk for ovarian cancer, you can take steps to prevent it.

Ovarian Cancer Signs and Symptoms



- Abdominal bloating
- Pelvic or abdominal pain
- Difficulty eating or feeling full quickly
- Urinary symptoms, such as urgency or frequency
- Fatigue
- Upset stomach
- Indigestion
- Back pain
- Pain with intercourse
- Constipation
- Menstrual irregularities
- Swelling in the pelvis or abdomen

These symptoms are general and certainly may indicate conditions other than cancer. If you experience one or more of these symptoms almost daily for two weeks or more and the symptoms are new and not normal for you, see your gynecologist or primary care physician. You know your body better than anyone. Stay calm and err on the side of caution.



Risk Factors for Ovarian Cancer

All women with ovaries, of every age and every ethnicity, carry some risk of developing ovarian cancer. But not all risks are weighted equally.

A risk factor is anything that increases a person's chance of developing a certain illness. Having one or more risk factors associated with a disease does not mean you will develop that disease. Having no risk factors for a disease does not mean you will not get that disease. But discussing risk factors with your doctor may help you make informed lifestyle choices including preventative measures appropriate to the severity of your risk.

- **A Strong Family History** of ovarian, fallopian tube, or breast cancer, especially if family members were diagnosed prior to age 50.
- **Inherited Risk** – An estimated 20 to 25 percent of ovarian cancers are linked to a known genetic mutation or several mutations passed down from either the mother or father. These include the BRCA 1 and 2 mutations and Lynch Syndrome, which may raise a woman's risk of ovarian, fallopian, uterine, colorectal, breast, and several other cancers.
- **Age** – Roughly half of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer are age 63 or older, but younger women may develop certain rare types of ovarian cancer.

- **Obesity** – Recent studies reveal that women who were significantly overweight in early adulthood may have an increased risk of developing ovarian/fallopian tube cancer.
- **Endometriosis** – A history of this condition in which the uterus lining grows outside the uterus may increase the risk of certain types of ovarian cancer including clear cell and endometrioid.
- **Ethnicity** – White women of North American, Northern European, or Ashkenazi Jewish heritage have an increased risk and are known to have higher rates of BRCA mutations. However, women of all races and ethnicities – Black, Latina, Asian – have been found to carry BRCA 1 or 2 mutations.
- **Menstrual and Reproductive History** – Ovarian cancer risk may be increased if women:
 - Have early menstruation (average age is about 12) or late menopause (average age is 51)
 - Have never given birth to a child
 - Have not breast-fed a child
 - Have unexplained infertility (the medical inability to have a child)
 - Have not taken birth control pills
- **Hormone Replacement Therapy** – Women who have taken estrogen-only hormone replacement therapy (HRT) after menopause may have a higher risk of ovarian/fallopian tube cancer. The risk becomes higher the longer a woman uses the therapy. The risk decreases over time after she stops.

How to Be Your Own Best Advocate

- Listen to your body and pay attention if something doesn't feel right.
- Knowledge is power! Know the symptoms of ovarian cancer.
- If changes in your body occur that are not normal to you, or if symptoms persist almost daily for two or more weeks, contact your gynecologist.
- Learn about your family's health history and communicate that information to your doctor. Consider genetic counseling or testing.
- Call SHARE to speak with someone who can provide information, guidance and support.

If you've been recently diagnosed with ovarian cancer, or if you're a survivor, we're here to help you.

Toll Free Ovarian Cancer Helpline: 866.537.4273
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Check out SHARE's Educational Programs and Support Groups

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