

Usdaw

Campaigning
For Equality

Women's Equality Women's Health – Ovarian Cancer



An advice leaflet
for Usdaw Members



What is ovarian cancer?

Ovarian cancer is the fourth most common cancer among women in the UK. There are about 7,000 new cases each year. A woman's lifetime risk of developing it is one in 52.

Ovarian cancer is cancer that arises in the ovaries, a pair of almond shaped glands that lie on each side of the uterus which is located in the pelvis.

The ovaries produce eggs and the female hormones that are responsible for female body characteristics as well as regulating the menstrual cycle. Ovarian cancer occurs when the cells in the ovary become abnormal and divide without control or order.

Cancer cells can invade and destroy the tissue around them. They can also break away from the tumour and spread to other parts of the body.

What are the symptoms?

In the early stages ovarian cancer does not generally cause symptoms. When they do occur, they are usually a result of the cancer growing and causing pressure or pain. Symptoms can be very vague and include:

- Pelvic and/or abdominal swelling and/or pain.
- Persistent digestive problems such as indigestion, nausea, constipation and wind.
- Weight gain or loss.
- Frequency and/or urgency of urination.
- Ongoing fatigue.
- Abnormal postmenopausal bleeding.
- Pain during intercourse.

What can you do if you are concerned?

As already pointed out, symptoms can be vague. Furthermore, the same symptoms occur with ovarian cysts. If you are worried, see your GP.

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What are the risk factors?

- **Age** – the risk of ovarian cancer increases with age and occurs mostly in women after they have gone through the menopause.
 - **Family history of ovarian, breast or bowel cancer** – inherited ovarian cancer is rare. There is an increased risk if there is a first-degree relative* with the disease, especially if they developed it at a young age. If there are two or more first-degree relatives* who have had the disease the risk is further increased.
 - **Childbearing and menstrual history** – women who have never been pregnant are more likely to develop ovarian cancer than women who have had children.
- There is also an increased risk for women who started having periods at an early age, had their first child after the age of 30 and/or went through the menopause after the age of 50. Breast feeding slightly lowers the risk.
- **Oral contraceptives** – women who have taken the pill have a lower risk of ovarian cancer.
 - **Fertility drugs** – prolonged use of fertility drugs, especially if a woman does not get pregnant, might increase the risk of ovarian cancer.

**First-degree relative(s) = your mother, sister or daughter.*

How can it be detected?

Currently there is no single conclusive reliable detection method equivalent to a smear test or mammogram.

Initially a doctor will:

- Ask questions about any previous medical problems, including those of family members.
- Ask questions about current symptoms.

A specialist may carry out further tests.

What treatment is available?

- **Surgery** – the initial treatment for almost all women with ovarian cancer.
- **Chemotherapy** – in most cases, chemotherapy is given after surgery.
- **Radiotherapy** – rarely used in the treatment of early ovarian cancer, but sometimes used to help with symptoms that arise as a result of advanced cancers.

Workplace support

Women diagnosed with ovarian cancer have important rights under the Equality Act. These could include the right to paid time off for treatment, a gradual return to work after treatment and a change of duties or hours of work.

For more information contact your local Usdaw office by calling 0845 6060640 or the Equalities Section at Central Office on 0161 224 2804 or email equalitymatters@usdaw.org.uk



Useful contacts

Wellbeing of Women (WOW)

First Floor
Fairgate House
78 New Oxford Street
London
WC1A 1HB

Tel: 020 36977000
email: hello@wellbeingofwomen.org.uk
web: www.wellbeingofwomen.org.uk

Cancer Research UK

Angel Building
407 St John Street
London
EC1V 4AD

Tel: 0808 800 4040 to speak to a nurse
Tel: 0300 1231022 for general questions
web: www.cancerresearchuk.org

Ovarian Cancer Action

8-12 Camden High Street
London
NW1 0JH

Tel: 020 7380 1730
email: info@ovarian.org.uk
web: www.ovarian.org.uk



Macmillan Cancer Support

89 Albert Embankment
London
SE11 7UQ

Tel: 0808 808 0000
web: www.macmillan.org.uk



Usdaw contacts

To find out more about the work of the Divisional Equalities Forums and Usdaw's equality work or about joining Usdaw contact:

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Cardiff Office
Tel: 029 2073 1131
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Equalities Section

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