

Ovarian Cancer

Ovarian cancer forms in tissues of the ovary. Most ovarian cancers fall into two categories: *epithelial cancer* that begins in the cells on the surface of the ovary and tends to spread throughout the pelvis and abdomen, and *malignant germ cell tumors* that begin in egg cells. These two types account for about 85 to 90 percent of ovarian cancers. Ovarian cancer is a serious disease, but it can be treated and many patients with ovarian cancer are cured.

Statistics

- One in 72 women will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer during her lifetime.
- In 2008, 21,650 women in the United States are expected to be diagnosed with ovarian cancer, and approximately 15,520 women will die from the disease.
- About two-thirds of American women with ovarian cancer are 55 or older.
- Nationally, ovarian cancer is the eighth most common cancer in women and the fifth-leading cancer death in women.
- In Texas, there are 1,390 estimated new ovarian cancer cases each year.

Risk Factors

- **Age:** Most women diagnosed with ovarian cancer are over 55 years old. In addition, older women who have never been pregnant are also at increased risk.
- **Personal History:** Women who have had breast, uterine, colon, or rectal cancer have a higher risk of ovarian cancer. Research confirms there is a link between breast and ovarian cancer.
- **Family History:** Women with immediate family members (mother or sister) with ovarian cancer have an increased risk of developing the disease. If you have a family history of cancer, genetic testing may point to preventative measures.
- **Diet:** Being overweight, including during the teen years, increases the risk of ovarian cancer.

Symptoms

Currently, there is no screening test for ovarian cancer. The Pap test does not screen for ovarian cancer; it screens for cervical cancer and some infections. Women should consult their physician if they experience any of the following symptoms associated with ovarian cancer:

- Bloating
- Pain in the pelvis, abdomen, or legs
- Difficulty eating or feeling full quickly
- Urinary symptoms (urgency or frequency)
- Nausea, indigestion, gas, constipation, or diarrhea
- Feeling very tired all the time

Prevention

Ovarian cancer cannot be prevented in most cases, but physicians say there are ways to reduce the risk of the disease.

- **Use of oral contraceptives:** Women who have used birth control pills for more than five years are at a lower risk of developing ovarian cancer.
- **Tubal ligation or a hysterectomy:** Studies show women who have undergone these surgeries are at a reduced risk of getting ovarian cancer.
- **Childbearing:** The risk of developing ovarian cancer decreases 45 percent in women with children compared to those women who have not had children.
- **Preventative removal of the ovaries:** Studies show that preventative removal of the ovaries in women who are at high risk for ovarian cancer because of a genetic mutation, decreases the risk of ovarian cancer by 96 percent and can reduce the risk of breast cancer by 68 percent.

Treatment Options

All women with ovarian cancer should consult with a medical oncologist and gynecologic oncologist to determine their specific treatment needs. Treatment for ovarian cancer may include surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy.

Sources: American Cancer Society, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Cancer Institute, and Ovarian Cancer National Alliance

