

Ovarian Cancer

What is ovarian cancer?

It is a type of cancer that grows in a woman's ovaries, which are two walnut-sized glands in the pelvis that produce eggs. Ovarian cancer is rare, but it can be life threatening. Risk factors include obesity, never having given birth, and taking hormone therapy after menopause. However, many women who get it do not have any of these risk factors.

Some women may inherit a gene that puts them at higher risk of getting ovarian cancer. If you have one or more first-degree relatives (sister or mother), or two or more second-degree relatives (grandmother or aunt) with ovarian cancer, you have a higher risk of getting it. You should talk to your doctor about getting tested for these genes.

How can I lower my risk of getting it?

There are no medicines or lifestyle changes to prevent ovarian cancer. Taking birth control pills and eating a low-fat diet may lower your risk. Early menopause and an increased number of childbirths may also lower your risk. If you have a gene that is linked to ovarian cancer and you no longer plan to have children, you may consider having surgery to remove your ovaries. Your doctor can help you make this decision.

How do I know if I have it?

Symptoms may include constant pain near your stomach, bloating, needing to urinate urgently or frequently, and feeling full before you are done eating. There may be many other causes for these symptoms. Your doctor may do an ultrasound or a blood test to see if you have a higher risk of ovarian cancer. Routine screening tests are not recommended.

How is it treated?

It depends on your age, the stage of the cancer, and whether you plan to have children. Treatment options usually include surgery and chemotherapy.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Academy of Family Physicians
Web site: <http://familydoctor.org>

National Cancer Institute
Telephone: 1-800-4-CANCER
Web sites: <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/ovarian>
or
<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/genetics/risk-assessment-and-counseling>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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