

Ovarian Cancer

Signs, symptoms and testing



Key signs and symptoms

01

Pain in your tummy, pelvis or back

02

Bloating that doesn't go away

03

Loss of appetite or feeling full quickly after eating

04

A more frequent or urgent need for a wee

These symptoms can be caused by conditions other than cancer but it's important to get them checked by a GP.

Ovarian cancer testing basics and next steps

Who is at higher risk for ovarian cancer?

There are a number of different possible causes of ovarian cancer but these aren't fully understood. The most important are age, and a strong family history of ovarian or breast cancer. Ovarian cancer mainly affects women over 50. Other risk factors include being overweight. There is also some evidence that conditions such as endometriosis and diabetes, as well as the use of HRT, may play a small role, although the evidence is currently limited.

How is ovarian cancer diagnosed?

Tests to check for ovarian cancer initially include a blood test and an ultrasound scan. These might be followed by a biopsy and/or other scans.

What if someone has a family history of ovarian cancer?

People who have a family history of ovarian cancer or breast cancer, or who have inherited a faulty gene that can increase risk, like the BRCA 1/2, should speak to their GP, who may refer them to a genetic counsellor.

Are there any other symptoms of ovarian cancer?

Yes. The key signs and symptoms are listed above, however additional symptoms may include:

- Feeling tired for no reason
- Changes to the way you poo
- Losing weight without trying or feeling sick
- Indigestion
- Bleeding between periods or after the menopause

These symptoms can be caused by conditions other than ovarian cancer. However, if these symptoms are new for you or won't go away, you should contact your GP.

When should you contact a GP?

- ✓ If you notice any of the symptoms on page one.
- ✓ If symptoms persist or feel different or new.
- ✓ If you are at a higher risk for prostate cancer.
- ✓ If you feel worried it's always better to check.

55%

Of women aged 25–54 worry about getting cancer in the future.

11%

Of ovarian cancer cases are thought to be preventable.

95%

Of those diagnosed with stage 1 ovarian cancer will survive for five years.

Common myths about ovarian cancer

Myth *“I’m too young to get ovarian cancer”*

Fact While most women who get ovarian cancer are over 50, it can affect younger women as well.

Myth *“A cervical smear test detects ovarian cancer”*

Fact Cervical smears only check for changes on the cervix, not the ovaries.

Myth *“HPV causes ovarian cancer”*

Fact HPV is linked to cervical cancer, but not to ovarian cancer. The HPV vaccine does not prevent ovarian cancer.

Myth *“There is a screening programme”*

Fact There is no national screening programme for ovarian cancer in the UK, as there isn't a test that reliably picks up ovarian cancer at an early stage.

Myth *“I’ve had my ovaries removed, so I can’t get ovarian cancer”*

Fact Even if you had your ovaries removed, you can still get ovarian cancer as it also affects the fallopian tubes and peritoneum (the lining of your tummy).

Myth *“I have a family history of ovarian cancer, so I will definitely get it”*

Fact If you have a family history of ovarian cancer or have inherited a faulty gene, a genetic counsellor can help you understand your personal risk.