

Ovarian Cancer

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Ovarian cancer is cancer that starts in the ovaries. Your ovaries are female reproductive glands on either side of the uterus that produce eggs and sex hormones. One in 72 women will develop ovarian cancer in her lifetime.

Risk Factors

The causes of ovarian cancer are not well understood. However, studies show that the following risk factors can increase a woman's risk of developing it:

- **family history** — having a mother, sister or daughter who has had the disease
- **personal history of cancer** — if you have had breast, uterine, colon or rectum cancer
- **age** — being older than age 55
- **never pregnant** — older women who have never been pregnant.

Symptoms

Early ovarian cancer often does not have symptoms. But, as the cancer grows, symptoms may include:

- bloating and stomach swelling
- nausea (upset stomach)
- indigestion
- constipation
- diarrhea
- shortness of breath

- need to urinate often
- unusual vaginal bleeding
- feeling very tired all the time.

Any of these symptoms may be caused by cancer or by other, less serious health problems.

If you have any of these symptoms and they do not go away or get worse, it is important that you see your health care provider right away.

Screening/Early Detection Guidelines

- It is important to have regular checkups with a pelvic exam so that doctors may detect it when it is more easily treated.
- Ovarian cancer responds best to treatment when it is diagnosed and treated as early as possible. You can take an active role in early detection by having regular checkups.

Diagnosis

Your health care provider will first perform a physical exam. If cancer is suspected, he or she may do one or more of the following tests:

- blood tests to determine the possible presence of a tumor that may be cancer (malignant).
- ultrasound to produce a picture of the pelvis including any mass that may be present.

Information adapted in part from the National Cancer Institute.