



CANCER RESEARCH UK



East Kent Hospitals University NHS Trust



Kent and Medway Cancer Network



Key messages for ovarian cancer for members of the public

Ovarian cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women, but to put this in perspective, the average GP sees only one case of ovarian cancer every five years. The risk of ovarian cancer does increase with age and particularly after the menopause. i

Cervical screening tests - sometimes known as smear tests - will not help to detect ovarian cancer. ii

The good news about ovarian cancer is that if diagnosed at an early stage, the outcome is good. However, because some of the symptoms of ovarian cancer are similar to those seen in more common conditions, it can be difficult to diagnose. Most women are not diagnosed until the disease has spread, which is why it is important that women know about the symptoms, so that they can seek advice as early as possible.

Ovarian cancer was once known as a 'silent' disease in that the symptoms can be vague, but evidence now shows that any of the following three symptoms, if they occur on most days, can suggest ovarian cancer. iii This has led for the first time to some of the UK's leading cancer charities, scientists and doctors iv agreeing that the following three symptoms are more frequent in women diagnosed with ovarian cancer. iii, v, vi, vii

- Persistent pelvic and abdominal pain
- Increased abdominal size/persistent bloating – not bloating that comes and goes
- Difficulty eating and feeling full quickly

Occasionally other symptoms such as urinary symptoms, changes in bowel habit, extreme fatigue or back pain may also be experienced on their own or at the same time as those listed above. viii Again, it is most likely that these symptoms are not ovarian cancer, but may be present in some women with the disease.

If you regularly experience any of these symptoms, which are not normal for you, it is important that you see your GP. It is unlikely that your symptoms are caused by a serious problem, but it is important to be checked out. You should also mention if there are two or more cases of ovarian or breast cancer in your close family, as ovarian cancer can sometimes run in families.

If you have already visited your GP and the symptoms continue or worsen, it is important to return and explain this to your doctor - you know your body better than anyone.

Remember, ovarian cancer is uncommon and early diagnosis may save lives.



Royal College of General Practitioners



Southend University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust






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Further information can be found on the following websites

- Cancer Research UK: www.cancerresearchuk.org
- The Eve Appeal: www.eveappeal.org.uk
- Macmillan Cancer Support: www.macmillan.org.uk
- NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk
- Ovacome: www.ovacome.org.uk
- Ovarian Cancer Action: www.ovarian.org.uk
- Target Ovarian Cancer: www.targetovarian.org.uk

References

- i Cancer Research UK (<http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/cancerstats/types/ovary/riskfactors/>) accessed July 2008
- ii Cervical screening tests are designed to detect pre-cancerous changes in the cervix, which, for some women, if untreated may lead to cervical cancer, not ovarian cancer, a fact which is commonly misunderstood [citation: Dr Foster Intelligence Survey 2007, commissioned by Ovarian Cancer Action]
- iii Goff B.A, Mandel L.S, Drescher CW, Urban N, Gough S, Schurman KM, Patar J, Mahony BS, Andersen M, Development of an Ovarian Cancer Index: Possibilities for Earlier Detection *CANCER*; 2007 Jan 15;109(2):221-7, Goff et al. 2001, 2004.
- iv The Eve Appeal in partnership with Ovacome 'Ovarian Cancer UK Consensus Statement' September 2008.
- v Ovarian Cancer in UKOPS interim analysis: preliminary results. As presented by Anita Lim at the Signs and Symptoms Ovarian Cancer Conference, London, 8 April 2008.
- vi A systematic review of the literature 1984- 2004. Bankhead, Kehoe, Austoker *BJOG* 2005; 112: 857-865.
- vii CR Bankhead, C Collins, H Stokes-Lampard, P Rose, S Wilson, A Clements, D Mant, Identifying Symptoms of ovarian cancer: a qualitative and quantitative study, *BJOG*, Volume 115, Issue 8, Page 1008-1014, July 2008.
- viii Barbara A. Goff, MD; Lynn S. Mandel, PhD; Cindy H. Melancon, RN; Howard G. Muntz, MD, Frequency of Symptoms of Ovarian Cancer in Women Presenting to Primary Care Clinics, *JAMA*. 2004;291:2705-2712.

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