



AMERICAN COLLEGE OF
OBSTETRICIANS AND
GYNECOLOGISTS

Cancer of the Ovary

Cancer of the ovary is a disease that affects one or both ovaries, the two organs on either side of the uterus.

What Is Cancer?

Sometimes, cells develop abnormally and begin to grow out of control. When this happens, too much tissue is made and begins to form growths or tumors.

Tumors can be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer).

Some tumors of the ovary are less likely to spread to other parts of the body. These are called borderline tumors or tumors with low malignant potential.

Epithelial cancers are the most common. About 90 percent of all ovarian cancers arise from epithelial cells. These are the cells that cover the surface of the ovaries.

About 10 percent of ovarian cancers are germ cell tumors. The rest are sex cord-stromal tumors. Both types tend to occur in women under 40 years old.

Who Is at Risk?

Women of any age can have cancer of the ovary, but the risk increases with age. It occurs most often in women who are between 50 and 75 years old. It is less common in women under 40, and more common in white women.

Symptoms

Cancer of the ovary often does not have any symptoms in its early stage. There are few symptoms of the disease. As a result, the cancer may not be found until it's in an advanced stage. This makes it harder to treat.

Screening

The best way to detect ovarian cancer at an early stage is by a pelvic and rectal exam. The doctor may be able to feel a tumor or cyst on one or both of the ovaries.

Other tests used to screen for ovarian cancer include ultrasound exam, chest X-ray and laparoscopy.

Treatment

If a woman is thought to have ovarian cancer, surgery is needed. The surgeon will explore the extent of the disease, remove the cancer, and decide what other treatment is needed.

Treatment is based on how fast the cancer is spreading.

Surgery for most patients includes removing the uterus (hysterectomy) and the ovaries and fallopian tubes (salpingo-oophorectomy).

The surgery often is followed by chemotherapy or radiation.

Finally ...

The key to fighting ovarian cancer is finding it early. The best way to do this is to have routine exams. Be alert

to changes in your body and point them out to your doctor. These changes could be as simple as an increase in your waistline or indigestion that seems to have no cause and does not respond to medicine.

This excerpt from ACOG's Patient Education Pamphlet is provided for your information. It is not medical advice and should not be relied upon as a substitute for visiting your doctor. If you need medical care, have any questions, or wish to receive the full text of this Patient Education Pamphlet, please contact your obstetrician-gynecologist.

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