

# Ovarian Cancer

## Understanding the Facts

Ingrid Adams, Nutrition and Food Science

**What is ovarian cancer?** Ovarian cancer occurs when cells in one or both ovaries grow out of control. Ovarian cancer can spread to other parts of the body if it is not found early.

### Did you know?

- In 2009 there were 21,550 new cases of ovarian cancer and 14,600 women died from the disease.
- The risk of ovarian cancer increases as women get older.
- Ovarian cancer is often diagnosed in the late stages because there are often no signs or symptoms until the cancer has spread.

### Good news

- When ovarian cancer is found in the early stages, treatment is most effective and the chances for recovery are improved.
- It is important for a woman to pay attention to her body so that she knows what is normal or what is out of the ordinary. Noticing changes makes early detection possible.

### How do I know if I am at risk for ovarian cancer?

The cause of ovarian cancer is not known, but certain factors help you know if you are at risk for developing the disease:

- You are age 50 or older. Most cancers develop after menopause.
- You have close family members such as your mother, sister, aunt or daughter who have had ovarian cancer.
- You have had breast, uterine, or colorectal (colon) cancer.
- You have never given birth or you have had trouble getting pregnant.

### What are some symptoms of ovarian cancer?

You should see your doctor if you have these signs or symptoms every day for a period of two weeks, if the following symptoms are not normal to you, or if the symptoms worsen.



- Pain in your belly or pelvis (the area below your stomach and between your hip bones)
- Back pain
- Being tired all the time
- Bloating (your belly feels full and tight or is swollen)
- Having difficulty eating or always feeling full
- Discharge or bleeding from your vagina that is not normal for you

These symptoms are often caused by something other than cancer, but only a doctor can tell for sure.



## How can I detect ovarian cancer early?

There is no simple way to test for ovarian cancer **in women who do not have any symptoms**. The Pap test does **not** check for ovarian cancer, but there are steps you can take:

- Pay attention to your body, and know what is normal for you.
- If you notice any changes in your body that are not normal for you and could be a sign of ovarian cancer, talk to your doctor about them and ask about possible causes.
- Join the more than 35,000 women in the free UK Ovarian Cancer Screening Program. Call 800-766-8279 or go to <http://ovarianscreening.info> for more information.

## What can I do to prevent ovarian cancer?

As with everything in life there is no sure way to prevent ovarian cancer, but there are things that you can do to decrease your chances of getting cancer.

### DIET

The foods you eat are important for your general health and well being. The following foods may help prevent cancer.

- **Fruits.** Try to eat 1½ cups of fruit every day. For example, have some sliced banana with your breakfast cereal; have an apple or ½ cup of fruit with your lunch; eat some blueberries as a snack.
- **Vegetables.** Eat 2½ to 3 cups of vegetables daily. Include dark green leafy veggies, squash, sweet potatoes, carrots, broccoli and cauliflower in your vegetable choices. Studies show that these veggies may protect from different types of cancers.
  - Try to include these vegetables at each meal and for a snack.
  - Add spinach to an omelet.
  - Serve two vegetables for dinner. This could mean serving a salad and a cooked vegetable.
  - Use dark green leafy vegetables such as spinach and leaf lettuce as the base of your salad.

- **Whole grain.** Use more whole-grain products such as whole-wheat bread, oat-meal, brown rice or cornmeal. Check the label to make sure the first ingredient is a whole grain.
- **Meat.** Limit the amount of red meat and processed foods such as bacon or hot dogs.
- **Fats.** Use healthy fats such as olive oil and canola oil in salad dressings and in cooking.

### EXERCISE

Be involved in physical activity for 30 minutes on five or more days of the week. Walking is an excellent exercise. Taking part in physical activity helps to maintain your muscles so you can keep doing the things you need to do.

### ACHIEVE A HEALTHY WEIGHT

To achieve a healthy weight, you need to balance the food you eat with physical activity. If you need to lose weight, aim to lose one pound per week. Slower is better with weight loss. Focus on a lifelong commitment of eating healthy and moving more. Remember, healthy weight is not a diet but a lifestyle.







## Resources

Ovarian Cancer National Alliance ([www.ovariancancer.org](http://www.ovariancancer.org))

The University of Kentucky Ovarian Cancer Screening Research Program (<http://ovarianscreening.info/> or 800-766-8279)

Women's Cancer Network ([www.wcn.org](http://www.wcn.org)), developed by the Gynecologic Cancer Foundation to inform women about gynecological cancers

## Suggestions for ovarian cancer survivors

We can learn a lot from the experiences of others who have walked a certain path in life. A case in point: Women who have survived ovarian cancer share their experiences to show how they overcame the challenge.

- Realize that you are precious and your life is precious. You have to do what is needed to take care of yourself!
- Be proactive in your health care.
- Make use of every test available to detect the disease.
- Surround yourself with friends and family.
- Educate others on the importance of yearly check-ups.

## References

American Cancer Society. Detailed Guide: Ovarian Cancer. Accessed April 1, 2010 from [http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/content/CRI\\_2\\_4\\_2X\\_What\\_are\\_the\\_risk\\_factors\\_for\\_ovarian\\_cancer\\_33.asp](http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/content/CRI_2_4_2X_What_are_the_risk_factors_for_ovarian_cancer_33.asp).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Physical activity for everyone. Accessed March 30, 2010 from <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/olderadults.html>.

National Cancer Institute. Ovarian Cancer. Accessed March 30, 2010 from <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/ovarian>.

The American Dietetics Association. Dietary Factors Influence Ovarian Cancer Survival Rates. Accessed March 30, 2010 from <http://www.eat-right.org/Media/content.aspx?id=6442451093>.