

Ovarian cancer information guide for Healthcare Professionals

Ovarian Cancer Action, the UK's leading ovarian cancer charity, has produced this information guide for healthcare professionals who work in primary care services, and occupational and human resource teams.

By consulting with healthcare professionals we endeavour to advance clinical practice to reduce delays in diagnosis and improve the accuracy of referrals.

We aim to contribute to your continuing professional development by alerting you to the latest research on the symptoms of ovarian cancer.

The evidence base is growing fast to demonstrate that ovarian cancer can no longer be described as the "silent killer."

Did you know?^{1,2}

- Ovarian cancer is the fifth most common cancer in women in the UK, with around 7,500 diagnoses each year, and more than 4,000 deaths from the disease
- The average GP only sees one case of ovarian cancer every five years
- Symptoms may be present for a medium of 12 months
- Ovarian cancer is often misdiagnosed for IBS. IBS diagnosis is most prevalent in people in their 20's and 30's. If a woman over 50 years of age presents with a new onset of IBS like symptoms, it may be a sign of a serious disease, and it is important that ovarian cancer is considered as a differential diagnosis.
- Most women are diagnosed at advanced stages of the disease, which is associated with poor survival rates. When diagnosed at an early stage the survival rates are as high as 98%.

Symptoms:¹

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

Other symptoms such as 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. In most cases it is unlikely that these symptoms are ovarian cancer, but they may be present in some women with the disease.

If a woman presents with the above symptoms that are persistent, continuous or worsening, it is important that ovarian cancer is considered and that a serum CA125 and pelvic ultrasound scan are arranged.

If, following examination, ovarian cancer is not suspected, you should encourage women to return to their GP if their symptoms persist or worsen.

Women can track their symptoms using our **symptoms diary** which can be downloaded from www.ovarian.org.uk/download-our-leaflets This will allow women to make a note of the type of symptoms they are experiencing as well as the frequency and will assist in appropriate referrals for diagnostic tests.

If you would like to use the diaries in your clinic, general practice, workplace or information cent please contact us and we will be happy to supply them to you directly.

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Risk Factors

The biggest risk factors for ovarian cancer are age and family history.

Around 80% of ovarian cancer cases are sporadic, meaning only 20% are hereditary. The risk of developing ovarian cancer increases with age. 80% of women diagnosed are over the age of 50².

90% of familial ovarian cancer cases are associated with the BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene faults, which are also associated with hereditary breast cancer. These gene faults are more common in certain populations, such as the Ashkenazi Jewish, Polish, Pakistani, Icelandic, Norwegian and Dutch.

The hereditary genetic condition, Lynch Syndrome, is associated with a small percentage of ovarian cancers. It is also linked to cancers of the stomach, bowel, bladder, uterus, biliary, and pancreas².

It is recommended that GPs refer women with a strong family history or breast, ovarian or bowel cancer to a geneticist for further risk assessment. Women, who are also eligible for enhanced breast screening, due to familial risk, should be made aware of the symptoms of ovarian cancer¹.

For more information on hereditary ovarian cancer you can order our booklet [Hereditary Ovarian Cancer: A guide for GPs](#).

Resources for Healthcare Professionals and Patients

Ovarian Cancer Action recognises the importance of supporting health professionals who may work with ovarian cancer. We can provide materials such as symptom leaflets, symptom posters, high risk leaflets, and symptom diaries.

Who to contact

Visit the Healthcare Professional section of our website for more information

www.ovarian.org.uk/health-professionals

or contact us on 020 7380 1740 or via email

info@ovarian.org.uk.

¹ Department of Health's Key Messages for Ovarian Cancer for Health Professionals published 2009.

² Cancer Research UK www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/ovarian-cancer