



HERA FOUNDATION

What every woman should know...

Ovarian cancer is a serious and under-recognized threat to women's health.

- Ovarian cancer kills more women than all the other gynecologic cancers combined.
- Ovarian cancer is the fifth leading cause of cancer death among women in the United States.
- One in 72 women will develop ovarian cancer in their life times.
- Almost 14,000 women will die this year alone. Almost 22,000 will be diagnosed.

Ovarian cancer is very treatable when caught early; the vast majority of cases are not diagnosed until too late.

- When ovarian cancer is caught before it has spread outside the ovaries, 90+% will survive 5 years.
- Only 24% of ovarian cancer is caught early.
- When diagnosed after the disease has spread the chance of five-year survival drops to less than 25%.

Ovarian cancer is difficult to diagnose

- There is no reliable screening test for the early detection of ovarian cancer, like the Pap smear for cervical cancer.
- Symptoms are often vague and easily confused with other diseases. However, new studies indicate that ovarian cancer has recognizable symptoms, even early stage disease. Knowing those symptoms can help save women's lives. (See Goff et al. [Cancer 89:2068-75, 2000](#) and Eltabbakh et al. [Gynecol Oncol 75:476-9, 1999](#).)

Raise Your Awareness

Early recognition of symptoms is the best way to save women's lives. Early symptoms include:

- Bloating, a feeling of fullness, gas
- Frequent or urgent urination
- Nausea, indigestion, constipation, diarrhea
- Menstrual disorders, pain during intercourse
- Fatigue, backaches. Take action if any symptoms last more than 2-3 weeks.

What You Should Ask Your Doctor

While everyone has these symptoms from time to time, it is important to know your own body and know when something is not right. **IF** you have these symptoms and they are not normal for you neither you nor your doctor knows why you are having them, **THEN** ask to have these important tests to help you rule out ovarian cancer.

1. Bimanual pelvic exam
2. Ca125 blood test (If it comes back elevated, ask your doctor to repeat this test monthly for several months. If it comes back progressively more elevated each time, even if the values are low, this is an indication that the condition could very likely be serious.)
3. Transvaginal ultrasound.

If ovarian cancer is suspected, it is very important for you to ask your doctor for a referral to a gyn/oncologist.

Why? Surgery has the greatest impact on length of survival over chemotherapy and gyn/oncologists are 3 to 4 times more likely to optimally remove all of the tumor and accurately stage the disease than gyn or general surgeons.

Who Has the Greatest Risk?

Those who...

- Have 2 or more relatives who have had ovarian cancer
- Have a family history of multiple cancers: ovarian, breast or colon cancer
- Were diagnosed with breast cancer under the age of 50
- Have a personal history of multiple exposures to fertility drugs
- Are of Ashkenazi Jewish descent
- Have had uninterrupted ovulation (never used birth control pills, or no pregnancies)
- Have the BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene mutation
- Are over the age of 50

Most women experience one or more of these symptoms from time to time, and only rarely do they indicate ovarian cancer. And remember - if you have ovarian cancer, and it is caught early, survival changes are excellent.

Raise the Awareness of All the Women You Know

Give this to every woman you know. By raising awareness, you are helping to save lives.

Educate YOURSELF

You will find many useful resources on the Internet. A great place to start is The Johns Hopkins Ovarian Cancer Web Site. This site was developed and is maintained by the Department of Pathology at the Johns Hopkins Hospital.

<http://ovariancancer.jhmi.edu>