



The Trinidad and Tobago Cancer Society

Ovarian Cancer

Early Detection & Treatment Guidelines



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What Are The Ovaries?

The ovaries are small, almond-shaped female reproductive organs. The ovaries produce the female hormones – estrogen and progesterone. They also release eggs. An egg travels from an ovary through a fallopian tube to the womb (uterus). When a woman goes through her “change of life” (menopause), her ovaries stop releasing eggs and produce far lower levels of hormones.

What Is Ovarian Cancer?

When cancer starts in the ovaries, it is called ovarian cancer. Ovarian cancer causes more deaths than any other cancer of the female reproductive system. But when ovarian cancer is found in its early stages, treatment is most effective. There are three main types of ovarian cancers that are distinguished by the cells within the ovary where the cancer originated.

- Epithelial Ovarian Cancer
- Germ Cell Tumors
- Stromal Tumors

What Are The Symptoms Of Ovarian Cancer?

Many times, women with ovarian cancer have no symptoms or just mild symptoms until the disease is in an advanced stage and hard to treat.

When symptoms occur they may include:

- Abdominal bloating or discomfort that is not related to menstruation
- Increased abdominal size or clothes fitting tighter around your waist
- Increased or urgent need to urinate
- Abnormal pelvic pain
- Nausea and gas
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Abnormal bleeding from the vagina
- Unusual fatigue
- Unexplained weight loss or gain
- Shortness of breath

What Causes Ovarian Cancer?

The cause of ovarian cancer is still unknown. It usually shows up in women 35 years and over and is more common in Caucasian women.

The following factors have found to slightly increase a woman's risk of getting ovarian cancer:

- First period at a young age – before the age of 12
- Later than average menopause – after the age of 50
- Use of fertility drugs
- No children – never giving birth

How Is Ovarian Cancer Diagnosed?

The diagnosis of ovarian cancer is usually made after careful physical exam and history are done. Unlike a pap smear for cervical cancer or a mammogram for breast cancer, there is currently no reliable test to screen healthy women for ovarian cancer.

Diagnosing ovarian cancer may include any or all of the procedures below:

- Pelvic exam
- CA-125 Blood Test
- Transvaginal Ultrasound
- Surgical Biopsy
- Genetic Testing
- Laparoscopy

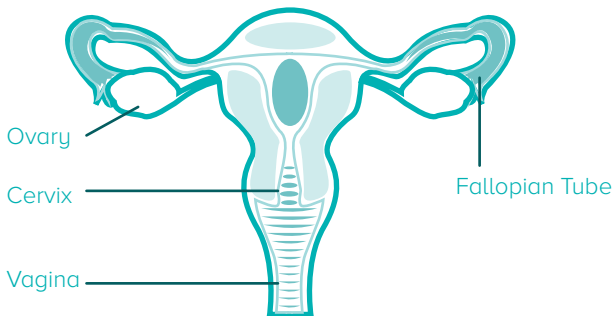
Although most women have a laparotomy for diagnosis, some women have a procedure known as laparoscopy. In this procedure, the doctor inserts a thin, lighted tube (a laparoscope) through a small incision in the abdomen. Laparoscopy may be used to remove a small, benign cyst or an early ovarian cancer. It may also be used to learn whether cancer has spread.

A pathologist uses a microscope to look for cancer cells in the tissue or fluid obtained from the ovaries. If ovarian cancer cells are found, the pathologist describes the grade of the cells. Grade 1, 2 and 3 describe the degree of abnormality of the cancer cells. Grade 1 cancer cells are not as likely to grow and spread as grade 3 cells.

How Is Ovarian Cancer Treated?

The main treatments for ovarian cancer are surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy. In some cases 2 or even all of these treatments will be recommended. Treatment of ovarian cancer depends on a number of factors including:

- The stage of the cancer
- The size of the tumor after debulking
- The patient's desire to have children
- Age and overall health of the patient



The Trinidad and Tobago Cancer Society recommends that you always consult your healthcare provider.

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