

## September is Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month

### Definition:

Ovarian cancer is a type of cancer that begins in the ovaries. Women have two ovaries, one on each side of the uterus. The ovaries — each about the size of an almond — produce eggs (ova) as well as the hormones estrogen and progesterone.

### The problem:

- 🎗️ Ovarian cancer often goes undetected until it has spread within the pelvis and abdomen. At this late stage, ovarian cancer is more difficult to treat and is frequently fatal.
- 🎗️ Early-stage ovarian cancer, in which the disease is confined to the ovary, is more likely to be treated successfully.
- 🎗️ Surgery and chemotherapy are generally used to treat ovarian cancer.

### Causes:

- 🎗️ The fewer children a woman has and the later in life she gives birth, the higher her risk of ovarian cancer.
- 🎗️ Women who have had breast cancer or have a family history of breast or ovarian cancer have an increased risk of ovarian cancer (due to defect in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes).
- 🎗️ Women who take estrogen replacement only (not with progesterone) for 5 years or more may have a high risk of ovarian cancer. Birth control pills, though, decrease the risk of ovarian cancer.
- 🎗️ Fertility drugs probably do not increase the risk of ovarian cancer.
- 🎗️ Older women are at highest risk of developing ovarian cancer.

### Symptoms:

Signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer may include:

- 🎗️ Abdominal bloating or swelling.
- 🎗️ Changes in bowel habits, such as constipation.
- 🎗️ Frequent and sudden need to urinate.
- 🎗️ Difficulty eating or feeling full quickly (early satiety).
- 🎗️ Pelvic or lower abdominal pain; the area may feel "heavy" (pelvic heaviness).
- 🎗️ Abnormal menstrual cycles.
- 🎗️ Digestive symptoms such as no appetite, indigestion, nausea and vomiting, constipation, increased gas.
- 🎗️ Back pain for unknown reasons that worsens over time.
- 🎗️ Vaginal bleeding that occurs between periods.
- 🎗️ Weight gain or loss.
- 🎗️ Excessive hair growth that is coarse and dark.

## When to see a doctor:

Make an appointment with your doctor if you have any signs or symptoms that worry you.

If you have a family history of ovarian cancer or breast cancer, talk to your doctor about your risk of ovarian cancer. Your doctor may refer you to a genetic counselor to discuss testing for certain gene mutations that increase your risk of breast and ovarian cancers. Only a small number of women are found to have genetic mutations that can lead to ovarian cancer.

## How can it be diagnosed?

There are tests that can be performed, including:

-  Ultrasound.
-  Blood tests such as the CA-125 test.
-  Advanced imaging tests, such as PET-scan, MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and CT-scan.

## Protective factors:

-  Oral contraceptives.
-  Pregnancy and breastfeeding.
-  Bilateral tubal ligation or hysterectomy.

## Prevention:

-  Stopping ovulation.
-  Diet and lifestyle.
-  Research into ovarian cancer has found the condition may be linked to being overweight or obese. Losing weight through exercise and having a balanced diet may help lower your risk of ovarian cancer.

## Treatment options:

There are two general approaches. One is surgery followed by chemotherapy, and the other is what we call neo-adjuvant chemotherapy. In this treatment plan, chemotherapy is administered first, followed by surgery if indicated.

## Reference Links:

-  <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/ovarian-cancer/basics/coping-support/con-20028096>
-  <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Cancer-of-the-ovary/Pages/Prevention.aspx>
-  <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001891/>

**For any enquiry or assistance please contact:** [wellness@medicaretpa.co.in](mailto:wellness@medicaretpa.co.in)

**Disclaimer:** No information contained here should be relied on in making health decisions. Always check with your doctor or other health care provider.