

Ovarian Cancer: Prevention



Some people have a higher risk of ovarian cancer. What can you do to help protect yourself? There's no sure way to prevent ovarian cancer. But there are some things you can do to reduce your risk.

Look at your family health history

Genes are linked to ovarian cancer. If your mother, sister, daughter, or aunt has had ovarian cancer, it raises your risk. Some gene syndromes passed in families are linked to a higher risk of ovarian cancer. These include:

- Lynch syndrome, also called hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer (HNPCC)
- Familial site-specific ovarian cancer syndrome
- Familial breast/ovarian cancer syndrome
- Peutz-Jeghers syndrome (PJS)
- MUTYH-associated polyposis

Let your healthcare provider know about your family health history. They might advise genetic counseling and testing to check for gene changes. These include changes on the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes. Knowing your genetic risk can help you make informed decisions about your health.

Know about birth control pills and pregnancy

Using birth control pills for a long time (5 years or more) lowers your risk of ovarian cancer. The longer you use them, the lower your risk becomes. This protection can last even after you stop taking the pills. Also having a full-term pregnancy lowers your risk. Talk to your healthcare provider about birth control options and family planning to find what's best for you.

Be careful with hormone replacement therapy (HRT)

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is often used for menopause symptoms. But using HRT may raise your risk of ovarian cancer. Talk to your healthcare provider about the risks and benefits before using HRT. Together, you can make the right choice for you.

Consider gynecologic surgery

Having some procedures may lower your risk for ovarian cancer. These include tubal ligation, removal of the ovaries, removal of the fallopian tubes, or a hysterectomy (removal of the uterus and sometimes the cervix). Some people choose to have these procedures done during another planned surgery, especially if they are at high risk for ovarian cancer. Talk with your healthcare provider about your risk factors and if these procedures are right for you.

Live a healthy lifestyle

Making healthy choices may lower your cancer risk, including ovarian cancer. Here are some habits to follow:

- **Eat balanced meals.** Focus on eating lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. Limit processed foods, unhealthy fats, and sugary snacks. Foods like berries, leafy greens, and nuts are healthy choices.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight or obese may raise your risk of ovarian cancer. Try to stay active and eat a balanced diet to keep a healthy weight.

- **Keep moving.** Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise or 75 minutes of more intense activity each week. Regular physical activity helps with weight control and reduces the risk of many cancers.
- **Quit smoking.** Smoking is linked to a higher risk of several cancers, including a certain type of ovarian cancer. If you smoke, seek support from your provider to quit.

Doing what you can

There's no sure way to prevent ovarian cancer. But you may be able to lower your risk and improve your overall health. Talk with your healthcare provider, especially if you have a family history of ovarian cancer. You can work together to help prevent or find cancer early.

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