



Ovarian Cysts

An ovarian cyst is a sac filled with fluid or semisolid material that forms on or within one or both of your ovaries. Your ovaries are small organs in your pelvis that hold egg cells and make hormones, such as estrogen and progesterone.

There are different types of ovarian cysts, most of which are painless and harmless (benign). Usually, ovarian cysts don't cause symptoms. You likely won't know you have one unless your doctor finds one during a routine pelvic exam or imaging procedure.

Rarely, ovarian cysts can cause complications. Scheduling regular pelvic exams and speaking with your doctor about any symptoms you may be experiencing can help prevent any problems with a cyst.

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What are the types of ovarian cysts?

Most ovarian cysts are functional cysts. They form in response to your body's changes during your menstrual cycle. Less commonly, ovarian cysts form for reasons unrelated to menstruation.

- **Follicular cysts.** A small sac in your ovary, called a follicle, releases an egg each month as part of your menstrual cycle. A follicular cyst forms when the follicle doesn't release an egg. Instead, the follicle fills with fluid and grows bigger.
- **Corpus luteum cysts.** After the follicle releases an egg, it forms a hormone-producing group of cells called the corpus luteum. A cyst forms when fluid collects in the corpus luteum, causing it to grow.

Sometimes, functional cysts are called simple cysts.

Other cysts

Not all ovarian cysts form in response to your menstrual cycle. They aren't always signs of disease, but your provider may want to monitor them to ensure that they don't cause complications. They include:

- **Cystadenomas.** These cysts form on the surface of your ovary. They can be filled with fluid that's thin and watery or thicker and mucous-like.
- **Dermoid cysts (teratomas).** Dermoid cysts consist of cells that make up all types of tissue in the human body, ranging from skin, hair, teeth and even brain tissue.
- **Endometriomas.** These cysts are filled with endometrial tissue, the same tissue that you bleed each month during your period.
- **Ovarian cancer.** Unlike the conditions above, ovarian cancer cysts (tumors) are solid masses of cancer cells.



How common are ovarian cysts?

Ovarian cysts are extremely common, especially if you haven't gone through menopause yet. Functional cysts are the most common type of ovarian cyst.

Who is affected by ovarian cysts?

Anyone with ovaries can develop an ovarian cyst. Your chances increase based on your:

- **Age.** Ovarian cysts are more common if you haven't gone through menopause.
- **History of ovarian cysts.** You're more likely to have an ovarian cyst if you've had one before.
- **Current medical conditions.** You're more likely to get an ovarian cyst if you have: endometriosis or hormone problems.

What are the signs and symptoms of an ovarian cyst?

Some smaller cysts cause no symptoms. In these cases, you may not even know you have a cyst. Larger cysts may cause:

- Pelvic pain or a dull ache in your back.
- A feeling of fullness (bloating) located in your lower belly that may feel more pronounced on one side of your body.
- Pain during intercourse (dyspareunia).
- Painful periods.



Symptoms that linger could indicate a condition called polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). PCOS is a condition that causes irregular periods and other hormone-related problems, including obesity and infertility. Other symptoms of polycystic ovary syndrome include hirsutism (increased growth of body hair) and difficulty losing weight.

How is an ovarian cyst diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will first rule out pregnancy as the cause of your symptoms. Then, they may use the following tests to diagnose an ovarian cyst:

- **A pelvic exam:** Your provider will feel inside your pelvis for any lumps or changes.
- **Ultrasound:** This imaging procedure uses sound waves to create images of your body's internal organs. It can detect cysts on your ovaries, including their location and whether they're primarily fluid or solid.
- **Laparoscopy:** This is a procedure performed in an operating room. Your provider inserts a camera through an incision (cut) in your abdomen and can view your reproductive organs and pelvic cavity. If your provider diagnoses a cyst at this time, they can remove it.

When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if any of the following occur:

- Your menstrual periods are late, irregular, or painful.
- Your abdominal pain doesn't go away.
- Your abdomen becomes enlarged or swollen.
- You have trouble urinating or emptying your bladder.
- You have pain during intercourse.
- You have feelings of fullness (bloating), pressure, or discomfort in your abdomen.

