

Overview

Ovarian cancer

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Ovarian cancer, or cancer of the ovaries, is one of the most common types of cancer in women.

The ovaries are a pair of small organs located low in the tummy. They are connected to the womb and store your supply of eggs.

Ovarian cancer mainly affects women who have been through [menopause](#) and are over the age of 50. But it can sometimes affect younger people.

Symptoms of ovarian cancer

Common symptoms of ovarian cancer include:

- feeling constantly bloated
- a swollen tummy
- discomfort in your tummy or pelvic area
- feeling full quickly when eating
- needing to pee more often than usual

The symptoms are not always easy to recognise. This is because they're like those of some other conditions, such as [irritable bowel syndrome \(IBS\)](#).

If you develop symptoms of IBS for the first time at 50 or over, you should see your GP. They may need to arrange some tests to rule out ovarian cancer.

When to see your GP

Talk to your GP if you have:

- been feeling bloated, particularly more than 12 times a month
- other symptoms of ovarian cancer that will not go away
- a family history of ovarian cancer and are worried you may be at a higher risk of getting it

It's unlikely you have cancer, but it's best to check. Your GP can do some simple tests to see if you have it.

[Find out more about how ovarian cancer is diagnosed](#)

If you have already talked to your GP and your symptoms continue or get worse, go back to them and explain this.

Causes of ovarian cancer

The exact cause of ovarian cancer is unknown.

But some things may increase a woman's risk of getting it, such as:

- being over the age of 50
- a family history of ovarian or [breast cancer](#) - this could mean you have inherited genes that increase your cancer risk
- [hormone replacement therapy \(HRT\)](#) - but any increase in cancer risk is likely to be very small
- [endometriosis](#) - a condition where tissue, like the lining of the womb, starts to grow in other places
- being overweight
- smoking
- lack of exercise
- exposure to asbestos

Treatment for ovarian cancer

The treatment for ovarian cancer depends on things such as how far the cancer has spread and your general health.

The main treatments are:

- surgery to remove as much of the cancer as possible - this often means removing both ovaries, the womb, the fallopian tubes and the layer of fatty tissue in the abdomen known as the omentum
- [chemotherapy](#) - this is usually used after surgery to kill any remaining cancer cells, and can be used before surgery to shrink the cancer
- targeted therapies - these are new types of treatments that may cause less damage to healthy

cells than chemotherapy - they work by targeting a particular part of the tumour cell

Treatment will aim to cure the cancer whenever possible. If the cancer has spread too far to be cured, the aim is to relieve symptoms and control the cancer for as long as possible.

Outlook for ovarian cancer

The earlier ovarian cancer is diagnosed and treated, the better the chance of a cure.

But often it's not recognised until it's already spread and a cure may not be possible.

Even after successful treatment, the cancer may come back within the next few years.

If it does come back, it usually cannot be cured. Chemotherapy may help reduce the symptoms. It can keep the cancer under control for several months or years.

Around 1 in 3 with ovarian cancer will live for at least 10 years after diagnosis.

[The Irish Cancer Society has more information on coping with a cancer diagnosis](#)

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