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Ovarian Cancer

What is ovarian cancer?

Cancer [<https://medlineplus.gov/cancer.html>] is a disease in which abnormal cells in the body grow out of control and form a tumor. Ovarian cancer is a cancerous tumor that forms in the tissues of an ovary. The ovaries are a pair of female reproductive glands that make eggs and female hormones [<https://medlineplus.gov/hormones.html>] .

What are the types of ovarian cancer?

There are a few different types of ovarian cancer. The most common type is epithelial cancer. It begins in the cells that cover the ovary.

There are also two related types of epithelial cancer that can spread to the ovaries:

- Fallopian tube cancer forms in the tissue lining a fallopian tube. The fallopian tubes are a pair of long, slender tubes on each side of the uterus. The uterus is the female reproductive organ where a fetus grows during pregnancy.
- Primary peritoneal cancer forms in the tissue lining the peritoneum. Your peritoneum is a tissue lining that covers the organs in the abdomen (belly).

These two cancers are like ovarian cancer, and they have the same treatments. So some medical experts also consider those two types as ovarian cancer.

Some other rarer types of ovarian cancer are malignant germ cell tumors and stromal tumors.

What causes ovarian cancer?

Ovarian cancer happens when there are changes (mutations) in the genetic material [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/ovarian-cancer>] (DNA). Often, the exact cause of these genetic changes is unknown.

Most ovarian cancers are caused by genetic changes that happen during your lifetime. But sometimes these genetic changes are inherited, meaning that you are born with them. Ovarian cancer that is caused by inherited genetic changes is called hereditary ovarian cancer.

There are also certain genetic changes that can raise your risk of ovarian cancer, including changes called BRCA1 [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/gene/brca1/>] and BRCA2 [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/gene/brca2/>] . These two changes also raise your risk of breast and other cancers.

Besides genetics, your lifestyle and the environment can affect your risk of ovarian cancer.

Who is more likely to develop ovarian cancer?

Certain people are more likely to develop ovarian cancer. They include those who:

- Have a family history of ovarian cancer in a mother, aunt, grandmother, or sister

- Have inherited changes in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes
- Have certain other genetic conditions, such as Lynch syndrome
- Have endometriosis [<https://medlineplus.gov/endometriosis.html>]
- Took hormone replacement therapy [<https://medlineplus.gov/hormonereplacementtherapy.html>]
- Are overweight or have obesity [<https://medlineplus.gov/obesity.html>]
- Are tall
- Are older, especially those who have gone through menopause [<https://medlineplus.gov/menopause.html>]
- Have never been pregnant

What are the symptoms of ovarian cancer?

Ovarian cancer may not cause early signs or symptoms. By the time you do have signs or symptoms, the cancer is often advanced.

The signs and symptoms may include:

- Pain, swelling, or a feeling of pressure in the abdomen (belly) or pelvis
- Sudden or frequent urge to urinate (pee)
- Trouble eating or feeling full
- A lump in the pelvic area
- Gastrointestinal problems, such as gas [<https://medlineplus.gov/gas.html>] , bloating, or constipation [<https://medlineplus.gov/constipation.html>]

How is ovarian cancer diagnosed?

To find out if you have ovarian cancer, your health care provider:

- Will ask about your **medical history**, including your symptoms
- Will ask about your **family health history**, including relatives who have had ovarian cancer
- Will do a **physical exam**, including a pelvic exam
- Will likely do imaging tests [<https://medlineplus.gov/diagnosticimaging.html>]
- May do **blood tests** such as a CA-125 blood test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/ca-125-blood-test-ovarian-cancer/>]

Often the only way to know for sure that you have ovarian cancer is by having a biopsy [<https://medlineplus.gov/biopsy.html>] of the tissue. A biopsy is done during surgery to remove the tumor.

What are the treatments for ovarian cancer?

Treatments for ovarian cancer may include:

- **Surgery** to remove as much of the cancer as possible
- **Chemotherapy** [<https://medlineplus.gov/cancerchemotherapy.html>]
- **Targeted therapy**, which uses drugs or other substances that attack specific cancer cells with less harm to normal cells

Your provider may suggest that you have **genetic testing** [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetictesting.html>] to look for the gene changes that raise the risk for ovarian cancer. Knowing whether you have the gene change may help your provider decide on your treatment plan.

NIH: National Cancer Institute

Start Here

- Ovarian Cancer [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/ovarian-cancer/symptoms-causes/syc-20375941?p=1>]
(Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/ovarian-cancer/symptoms-causes/syc-20375941?p=1>]

What Is Ovarian Cancer? [<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/ovarian-cancer/about/what-is-ovarian-cancer.html>]




(American Cancer Society)

Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.org/es/cancer/tipos/cancer-de-ovario/acerca/que-es-cancer-de-ovario.html>]

Symptoms

- Symptoms of Ovarian Cancer [<https://www.cdc.gov/ovarian-cancer/symptoms/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cdc.gov/ovarian-cancer/es/symptoms/>]


Diagnosis and Tests

- Abdominal exploration - series [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/presentations/100049_1.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/esp_presentations/100049_1.htm]
- Alpha Fetoprotein (AFP) Tumor Marker Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/alpha-fetoprotein-afp-tumor-marker-test/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-marcador-tumoral-afp-alfafetoproteina/>]
- BRCA Genetic Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/brca-test/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-brca/>]
- CA 125 Blood Test (Ovarian Cancer) [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/ca-125-blood-test-ovarian-cancer/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-antigeno-de-cancer-125-para-cancer-de-ovario/>]
- Can Ovarian Cancer Be Found Early? [<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/ovarian-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/detection.html>] (American Cancer Society)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.org/es/cancer/tipos/cancer-de-ovario/deteccion-diagnostico-clasificacion-por-etapas/deteccion.html>]
- CEA Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/cea-test/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-ace/>]
- Laparoscopy [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/laparoscopy/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/laparoscopia/>]
- Ovarian Cancer Stages [<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/ovarian-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/staging.html>] (American Cancer Society)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.org/es/cancer/tipos/cancer-de-ovario/deteccion-diagnostico-clasificacion-por-etapas/clasificacion-por-etapas.html>]
- Ovarian, Fallopian Tube, and Primary Peritoneal Cancers Screening [<https://www.cancer.gov/types/ovarian/patient/ovarian-screening-pdq>]  (National Cancer Institute)
- Tests for Ovarian Cancer [<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/ovarian-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/how-diagnosed.html>] (American Cancer Society)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.org/es/cancer/tipos/cancer-de-ovario/deteccion-diagnostico-clasificacion-por-etapas/como-se-diagnostica.html>]
- Tumor Marker Tests [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/tumor-marker-tests/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/marcadores-tumorales/>]

Prevention and Risk Factors

- Ovarian Cancer Risk Factors [<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/ovarian-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/risk-factors.html>] (American Cancer Society)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.org/es/cancer/tipos/cancer-de-ovario/causas-riesgos-prevencion/factores-de-riesgo.html>]


Treatments and Therapies

- Drugs Approved for Ovarian, Fallopian Tube, or Primary Peritoneal Cancer [<https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/drugs/ovarian>]  (National Cancer Institute)
- Treatment for Stromal Tumors of the Ovary, By Stage [<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/ovarian-cancer/treating/stromal-tumors.html>] (American Cancer Society)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.org/es/cancer/tipos/cancer-de-ovario/tratamiento/tumores-estromales.html>]



Living With

- Living as an Ovarian Cancer Survivor [<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/ovarian-cancer/after-treatment/follow-up.html>] (American Cancer Society)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.org/es/cancer/tipos/cancer-de-ovario/despues-del-tratamiento/cuidado-de-seguimiento.html>]

Related Issues

- Oral Contraceptives and Cancer Risk [<https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/hormones/oral-contraceptives-fact-sheet>]  (National Cancer Institute)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.gov/espanol/cancer/causas-prevencion/riesgo/hormonas/hoja-informativa-pildoras-anticonceptivas>]
- Ovarian Cancer: Still Possible after Hysterectomy? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/ovarian-cancer/expert-answers/ovarian-cancer/FAQ-20057780?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/ovarian-cancer/expert-answers/ovarian-cancer/faq-20057780?p=1>]




Specifics

- Ovarian Epithelial, Fallopian Tube, and Primary Peritoneal Cancers Treatment [<https://www.cancer.gov/types/ovarian/patient/ovarian-epithelial-treatment-pdq>]  (National Cancer Institute)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.gov/espanol/tipos/ovario/paciente/tratamiento-epitelial-ovario-pdq>]
- Ovarian Germ Cell Tumors Treatment [<https://www.cancer.gov/types/ovarian/patient/ovarian-germ-cell-treatment-pdq>] (National Cancer Institute)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.gov/espanol/tipos/ovario/paciente/tratamiento-celulas-germinativas-ovario-pdq>]
- Ovarian Low Malignant Potential Tumors Treatment [<https://www.cancer.gov/types/ovarian/patient/ovarian-low-malignant-treatment-pdq>]  (National Cancer Institute)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.gov/espanol/tipos/ovario/paciente/tratamiento-ovario-bajo-potencial-maligno-pdq>]

Genetics

- About Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancers [<https://www.cdc.gov/breast-ovarian-cancer-hereditary/about/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- BRCA Gene Changes: Cancer Risk and Genetic Testing [<https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/genetics/brca-fact-sheet>]  (National Cancer Institute)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.gov/espanol/cancer/causas-prevencion/genetica/hoja-informativa-brca>]
- Genetic Counseling for Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer [<https://www.cdc.gov/breast-ovarian-cancer-hereditary/genetic-counseling/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Ovarian cancer: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/ovarian-cancer/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
- People at Increased Risk for BRCA Gene Mutations [<https://www.cdc.gov/breast-ovarian-cancer-hereditary/risk-factors/index.html>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- What Causes Ovarian Cancer? [<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/ovarian-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/what-causes.html>] (American Cancer Society)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.org/es/cancer/tipos/cancer-de-ovario/causas-riesgos-prevencion/que-lo-causa.html>]

Images

- Ovarian Cancer Stage I [<https://visualsonline.cancer.gov/details.cfm?imageid=8281>]  (National Cancer Institute)
- Ovarian Cancer Stage II [<https://visualsonline.cancer.gov/details.cfm?imageid=8282>]  (National Cancer Institute)
- Ovarian Cancer Stage IIIC [<https://visualsonline.cancer.gov/details.cfm?imageid=9067>]  (National Cancer Institute)

Statistics and Research

- Advances in Ovarian Cancer Research [<https://www.cancer.gov/types/ovarian/research>]  (National Cancer Institute)





Key Statistics about Ovarian Cancer [<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/ovarian-cancer/about/key-statistics.html>]

(American Cancer Society)

Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.org/es/cancer/tipos/cancer-de-ovario/acerca/estadisticas-clave.html>]

- Ovarian Cancer Statistics [<https://seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/html/ovary.html>]  (National Cancer Institute)

Clinical Trials



- ClinicalTrials.gov: Fallopian Tube Neoplasms [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Fallopian+Tube+Neoplasms%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer Syndrome [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Hereditary+Breast+and+Ovarian+Cancer+Syndrome%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Ovarian Neoplasms [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Ovarian+Neoplasms%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Peritoneal Neoplasms [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Peritoneal+Neoplasms%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles


References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Trajectories of Cancer Antigen 125 (CA125) Within 3 and 6 Months... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40710200>]
- Article: Glutamine-driven metabolic reprogramming promotes CAR-T cell function through mTOR-SREBP2 mediated HMGCS1... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40676647>]
- Article: Geneva Homologous Recombination Deficiency Test Is Predictive of Survival Benefit From... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40601896>]
- Ovarian Cancer -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Peritoneal+Neoplasms%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+OR+%22Fallopian+Tube+Neoplasms%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+OR+%22Ovarian+Neoplasms%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bedat%5D+AND+%28patient+education+handout%5Bpt%5D+OR+guideline%5Bpt%5D+OR+clinical+trial%5Bpt%5D%29++NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Reference Desk

- Dictionary of Cancer Terms [<https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms>]  (National Cancer Institute)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.gov/espanol/publicaciones/diccionarios/diccionario-cancer/>]
- Reproductive System: Female Anatomy [<https://visualsonline.cancer.gov/details.cfm?imageid=8262>]  (National Cancer Institute)

Find an Expert

- American Cancer Society [<https://www.cancer.org/>]
- Choosing a Cancer Doctor [<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/finding-care/where-to-find-cancer-care/choosing-a-cancer-doctor.html>] (American Cancer Society)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.org/es/cancer/como-sobrellevar-el-cancer/encontrar-tratamiento/como-elegir-un-medico-y-un-hospital/como-seleccionar-a-un-medico.html>]
- Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health [<https://womenshealth.gov/>]
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.womenshealth.gov/>]
- How to Find Find an Ob-Gyn [<https://www.acog.org/womens-health/find-an-ob-gyn>]
(American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists)
- National Cancer Institute [<https://www.cancer.gov/>] 
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.gov/espanol>]

NCI - Designated Cancer Centers [<https://www.cancer.gov/research/infrastructure/cancer-centers>]

 (National Cancer Institute)

Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.gov/espanol/investigacion/infraestructura/centros-oncologicos>]

- Organizations that Offer Cancer Support Services [<https://supportorgs.cancer.gov/home.aspx>]  (National Cancer Institute)

Also in Spanish [<https://supportorgs.cancer.gov/home.aspx?lang=2>]

Children

- Childhood Ovarian Cancer Treatment [<https://www.cancer.gov/types/ovarian/patient/child-ovarian-treatment-pdq>]

 (National Cancer Institute)

Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.gov/espanol/tipos/ovario/paciente/tratamiento-ovario-infantil-pdq>]

Patient Handouts

- BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene testing [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000690.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)

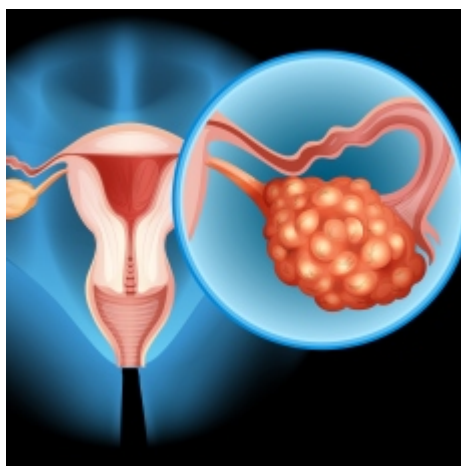
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000690.htm>]

- CA-125 blood test [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007217.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)

Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/007217.htm>]

- Ovarian cancer [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000889.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)

Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000889.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Abdominal exploration [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002928.htm>]

Abdominal exploration - series [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/presentations/100049_1.htm]

Abdominal radiation - discharge [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000054.htm>]

Abdominal tap [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003896.htm>]

After chemotherapy - discharge [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000012.htm>]

Alpha fetoprotein [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003573.htm>]

BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene testing [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000690.htm>]

CA-125 blood test [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007217.htm>]

Diagnostic laparoscopy [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003918.htm>]

Estradiol blood test [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003711.htm>]

Ovarian cancer [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000889.htm>]

Pelvic radiation - discharge [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000059.htm>]

Pelvis MRI scan [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007355.htm>]

Radiation enteritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000300.htm>]

Sertoli-Leydig cell tumor [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001172.htm>]

Transvaginal ultrasound [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003779.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Ovarian Disorders [<https://medlineplus.gov/ovariandisorders.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Ovarian Cancer* is the National Cancer Institute [<http://www.cancer.gov/>]

NIH MedlinePlus Magazine

3 Types of Ovarian Cancer, Explained [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/3-types-of-ovarian-cancer-explained>]

By the Numbers: Ovarian Cancer [<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/by-the-numbers-ovarian-cancer>]

Olympic Gymnast Shannon Miller: Accepting Help was Essential to Ovarian Cancer Recovery
[<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/olympic-gymnast-shannon-miller-accepting-help-was-essential-to-ovarian-cancer-recovery>]

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