



## ELDERCARE PROGRAMME

### OVARIAN CANCER

Studies show that these days, people live longer than ever before. As a result, many elderly people will have health concerns that are more common in old age. Elderly women, especially, are at risk of ovarian cancer and there are 123 women for every 100 men aged 60 and over worldwide.

# NEWSLETTER

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*This sheet is for your general information and is not a substitute for medical advice. You should contact your physician or other healthcare provider with any questions about your health, treatment or care.*

We have included some additional reading material for your information and benefit – enjoy!

239 000 women were diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2012, which resulted in 152 000 deaths worldwide. This makes ovarian cancer the seventh most common cancer among women. It is furthermore the eighth most common cause of cancer-related death, since the diagnosis is often made at an advanced stage as the signs and symptoms are subtle and may be initially misdiagnosed as another condition, such as irritable bowel syndrome.

#### What are the signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer?

*Early signs of ovarian cancer may include:*

- » bloating
- » abdominal pain
- » pelvic pain
- » pain in the side.

*Late signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer include:*

- » bloating
- » abdominal or pelvic pain and discomfort
- » back pain
- » irregular period
- » post-menopausal vaginal bleeding
- » pain or bleeding after or during sexual intercourse
- » difficulty eating or loss of appetite
- » fatigue
- » diarrhoea
- » indigestion
- » heartburn
- » constipation
- » nausea
- » frequent or urgent urination; typically caused by the mass pressing on the other abdominal-pelvic organs.

*Continued overleaf →*

## Screening tests

At the moment there are no screening tests available that are reliable enough to detect ovarian cancer at an early stage. However, a lot of research is being done to look into it. Women with ovarian cancer tend to have higher **CA125 blood levels** (tumour marker for ovarian cancer). CA125 can also be raised for other non-cancerous conditions; however it could indicate that further investigation needs to be done.

A pelvic physical examination and transvaginal ultrasound (a sonogram/picture taken by probe inserted in the vagina) may provide a better picture of the ovaries than an abdominal ultrasound, even though it can be difficult to tell if it is cancer or a cyst in the ovary.

## PREVENTION

- People with strong genetic risk for ovarian cancer may consider surgical removal of the ovaries after their childbearing years. Removal of the womb or uterus (**hysterectomy**) reduces the chances of developing both breast cancer (by 50%) and ovarian cancer (by 96%) in people with a high risk.
- **Healthy lifestyle e.g. quit smoking:** If you have smoked for many years, you may think that it is too late to quit as the damage is already done. But quitting has immediate health benefits even for lifelong smokers and people with smoking-related conditions. The risk begins to decrease immediately once you quit smoking.



- **Healthy eating:** Nutrient-rich foods are vital for our bodies as we age. Lots of vegetables and high protein, less fat, salt and starch and regular physical exercise is recommended to keep a healthy body weight as obesity is also found to increase the risk of ovarian cancer.



## Treatment

Treatment for ovarian cancer may involve hormone therapy, chemotherapy and sometimes radiotherapy or surgery, depending on the nature and severity of the tumour.

Please make it a habit that at least once a year you ask your doctor to do all the screening tests that are relevant to you.

**Remember: with early detection, one stands a better chance of prevention and cure!**

## REFERENCE