



York Against Cancer

Ovarian cancer; be aware

Ovarian cancer is a cancer that not many women think about as there is no routine screening to detect it. According to Cancer Research UK, each year around 7,400 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer in the UK.

Ovarian cancer is caused by mutations in the cells in and around the ovary and fallopian tubes. As with most cancers, the risk of developing ovarian cancer increases as a woman gets older. Women over the age of 50 have a higher risk, and most cases of ovarian cancer occur in women who have already gone through the menopause. CRUK say the highest rates of ovarian cancer are between the ages of 45 to 75. Fit, active, healthy women are just as likely to develop ovarian cancer as those with underlying health issues. This is why it is so important that all women are aware of the symptoms.



Eighty to eighty five per cent of ovarian cancer cases are 'sporadic'.

This means they are one-offs, not inherited, and close female relatives face no significant increase in their risk of developing the disease themselves. It is believed that the other 15-20% of cases are linked to the BRAC1 or BRAC2 gene which is linked to breast cancer.

Symptoms

Symptoms can be frequent and persistent. They may include;

- Feeling full quickly, being unable to eat a full meal, losing your appetite,
- Bloating that does not go away, that is persistent, not intermittent,
- Needing to wee more often than normal,
- Pelvic or abdominal discomfort or pain,
- You may feel very tired or have unexplained weight loss and possible changes in your bowel habits, including constipation.

Many of these symptoms can develop as general feelings of discomfort and can be easily overlooked.

Sometimes they are mistaken for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), but if your symptoms are not improving, go back to the GP or seek a second opinion. If you are regularly getting one or more of the above symptoms please see your GP without delay.

Testing and diagnosis

A simple blood test is used to measure a protein called CA125. The CA125 blood test is a useful way to gather some more information and will help your GP decide what to do next. If the CA125 protein level is elevated you should be referred for an ultrasound scan so you can be checked for any unusual changes. If any changes are seen that might indicate ovarian cancer, your GP will arrange for an appointment with a gynaecological oncologist for further investigations.

Treatment

Treatment of ovarian cancer varies depending on your situation. There are differing grades and types which respond to different treatment. Any treatment will be targeted at your specific type of cancer. Chemotherapy and surgery are the usual treatments. Surgery often involves removal of the affected ovary and any other areas involved. The type, length and amount of chemotherapy will depend on the grade and stage of the cancer. There are many new drugs available to treat ovarian cancer and trials continue to find others.

Survival rates

Survival rates are much higher for women diagnosed at an early stage, before the cancer has spread. Many women present with more advanced cancer, but even with advanced disease, treatments are available. When diagnosed at its earliest stage, more than 9 in 10 (93%) people with ovarian cancer will survive their disease for five years or more, compared with almost 3 in 20 (13%) of people when the disease is diagnosed at the latest stage. Overall, more than 4 in 10 (42.6%) of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer in England survive their disease for five years or more.

So it is vital **NOT** to ignore symptoms.

You **can** recover from ovarian cancer.

Our supporters include two local women who have done just that:

Joan: Joan was diagnosed in 2016 after noticing persistent abdominal swelling and tiredness, but no other obvious symptoms. Her swelling was found to be due to a large amount of fluid in her abdomen. She was referred by the GP with a raised CA125 and following a scan and draining of the fluid, Joan started chemotherapy and had surgery. Despite a high-grade tumour, Joan is now fit and well.

Joan's message: Please do not ignore any persistent symptoms. See your GP if you have any concerns.

Jane: Jane was diagnosed with advanced ovarian cancer after a routine smear test, which found abnormal cells. The tumour was also affecting the bowel and treatment was immediate, involving both high-dose chemotherapy and surgery. Despite a poor prognosis initially, Jane is still doing well after five years.

Jane's message: I was lucky, although I had a large tumour, I had very few symptoms and undoubtedly was saved by the timing of the smear test. Always see the doctor if you are uneasy, even if you have mild symptoms and never ignore a routine cancer test.

For further information about ovarian cancer, please go to the Target Ovarian Cancer website which has a lot of valuable information:

www.targetovariancancer.org.uk