

Ovarian Cancer: What All Women Need to Know

Ovarian cancer is a killer disease.

- It is the deadliest of all gynecologic cancers and the fifth leading cause of cancer deaths among American women.
- One in 71 women will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer during their lifetime.
- More than 21,000 American women will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer each year.
- More than 15,000 American women died from the disease in 2008.

Early detection greatly increases survival.

- Ovarian cancer is difficult to diagnose because symptoms are often subtle and easily confused with other conditions.
- When ovarian cancer is detected before it has spread beyond the ovaries, nine out of 10 women will survive for more than five years. However, only 19% of ovarian cancer cases in the United States are diagnosed at this early stage.
- Approximately 67% of ovarian cancer cases are diagnosed at an advanced stage after the cancer has spread beyond the ovaries.
- The overall five-year survival rate is approximately 46%.

Learn ovarian cancer's subtle symptoms.

- Many people do not know that ovarian cancer causes these symptoms in the majority of women who develop the disease: bloating; pelvic and abdominal pain; difficulty eating or feeling full quickly; and urinary symptoms (urgency or frequency).
- Additional symptoms may include fatigue, indigestion, back pain, pain with intercourse, constipation and menstrual irregularities.
- Research shows that 90% of women with early-stage ovarian cancer do experience symptoms. Without increased education, many women, and their doctors, will ignore or misinterpret symptoms.
- Women need to know if they may be at a higher risk for ovarian cancer, and what action to take, such as exploring whether to have a hysterectomy. Factors that increase risk include: increasing age; personal or family history of ovarian, breast or colon cancer; and never having been pregnant or given birth to a child.
- About 10 to 15 percent of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer have a hereditary tendency to develop the disease.

More research is needed to develop an early detection test and a cure.

- There is no reliable and easy-to-administer early detection test for ovarian cancer (as there is for cervical cancer with a Pap test).
- Ovarian cancer research is drastically under-funded from a survival perspective. Federal appropriations for ovarian cancer research have declined in real dollars, although the death rate has remained stagnant for 30 years.

