

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.
- A woman's lifetime risk of developing invasive ovarian cancer is 1 in 71.
- More than 21,000 American women will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer each year.
- More than 14,000 American women died from the disease in 2009.

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 percent of ovarian cancer cases in the United States are diagnosed at this early stage.
- Approximately 67 percent 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 percent.

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 women with 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.

