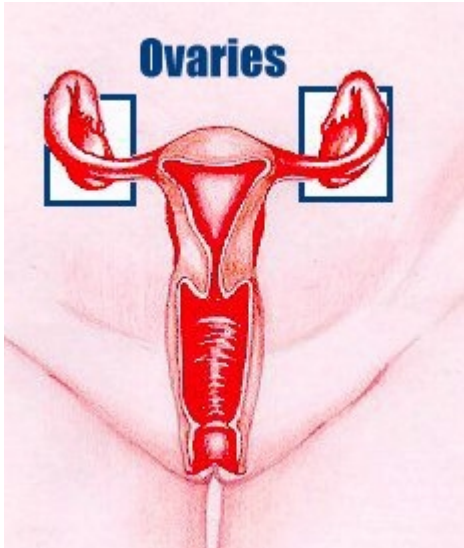


Women's Cancer Information Project

Coordinated by the European Institute of Women's Health

Ovarian Cancer



The ovaries are two small egg-producing glands the size of olives . They are situated on either side of the [womb](#).

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Ovarian cancer often does not cause any noticeable symptoms. Pain is very rarely a symptom. Some warning signs you should look out for are:

- Vaginal bleeding.
- Sudden weight gain or loss.
- Abnormal menstrual cycles.
- A persisting enlarged abdomen. This is caused by a build up of fluid, a common feature of ovarian cancer. Swelling that comes and goes is **not** connected to ovarian cancer.

If suspected, ovarian cancer is often detected by having a [pelvic examination](#). [Ultrasound](#) can also be used in cancer detection. As there is no screening test yet for ovarian cancer and the symptoms are so vague, many women are not diagnosed as having ovarian cancer until it is in its advanced stages. There are no known causes of ovarian cancer, although it is more common in women with no children.

RISK FACTORS

- Having no children or a history of infertility. This risk factor relates to the fact that the ovaries have been active, ovulating every month without the rest period that pregnancy gives to the ovaries.
- A family history of ovarian cancer.
- Over age 40 (highest risk is over age 60).
- Obesity.
- Women who already have been diagnosed with breast, intestinal or rectal cancer.

The following factors appear **to reduce** the risk of ovarian cancer, as they all stop ovulation (the process whereby the egg is released).

- Early age of first pregnancy.
- Breast feeding.
- Early menopause.
- The use of oral contraceptives.

There is a clear benefit from the Pill – the longer the better – and this applies to cancer of the endometrium as well.

TREATMENT

[Surgery](#) is the normal treatment for this kind of cancer. This may involve the removal of one or both ovaries, the uterus and the fallopian tubes. If the cancer is detected early, especially in younger women, it is possible that only the cancerous ovary will be removed and fertility may remain. [Chemotherapy](#) and radiation may also be used as follow up treatment.
