

Increasing Awareness of Ovarian Cancer



According to the American Cancer Society, it is estimated that approximately 22,280 women will receive a new diagnosis of ovarian cancer in 2016. There are three types of ovarian cancer, but epithelial ovarian cancer accounts for 85 percent to 89 percent of ovarian cancers. To increase public awareness of this disease, the **Louisiana State Board of Nursing** is providing the following information.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ovarian cancer will affect 1 in 75 women in the United States over their lifetime. Ovarian cancer is the deadliest cancer of the female reproductive system.

A Pap test does not detect ovarian cancer. Historically, ovarian cancer was called the “silent killer” because symptoms were not thought to develop until the chance of cure was poor. Recent studies have shown this to be untrue.

RISK FACTORS

Following are a few risk factors to consider. Review the attached table for more information.

- ❖ **Age:** The risk of developing ovarian cancer gets higher with age. Most ovarian cancers develop after menopause.
- ❖ **Obesity:** Various studies have linked obesity (those with a body mass index of at least 30) have a higher risk.
- ❖ **Reproductive history:** Women who have their first full-term pregnancy after age 35 or who never carried a pregnancy to term have a higher risk. Breastfeeding may lower the risk.
- ❖ **Birth control:** Women who use oral contraceptives or the Depo-Provera shot may have a lower risk.
- ❖ **Gynecologic surgery:** Having your tubes tied or having a hysterectomy may reduce the risk.
- ❖ **Fertility drugs:** Some studies have found that using certain fertility drugs for longer than a year may increase the risk for developing ovarian tumors.
- ❖ **Androgens:** Women who took androgens (a male hormone) have been found to have a higher risk. Further study is needed.
- ❖ **Estrogen therapy and hormone therapy:** Some recent studies suggest women using estrogens after menopause have an increased risk. This increased risk is uncertain for women taking both estrogen and progesterone.
- ❖ **Family history of ovarian, breast, or colorectal cancer:** A family history of these types of cancer has been linked to an increased risk due to gene mutation. Your risk may also be higher if you have a personal history of breast cancer.

- ❖ **Talcum powder:** In the past, talcum powder was sometimes contaminated with asbestos. It has been suggested that talcum powder applied directly to the genital area or on sanitary napkins may increase your risk.
- ❖ **Diet:** A study of women who followed a low-fat diet for at least 4 years showed a lower risk of ovarian cancer.
- ❖ **Analgesics:** In some studies, both aspirin and acetaminophen have been shown to reduce the risk of ovarian cancer. This being said, it is not recommended that women start taking these medications in an effort to prevent ovarian cancer.

SYMPTOMS

Ovarian cancer has been called the “silent killer” because early symptoms were not recognized. Learn to listen to your body.

The following symptoms are much more likely to occur in women with ovarian cancer, even in the early stage of the disease:

- ❖ Bloating
- ❖ Pelvic or abdominal pain
- ❖ Difficulty eating for feeling full quickly
- ❖ Feeling urgency to urinate
- ❖ Frequent urination



If you experience these symptoms almost daily for more than a few weeks, you should see your doctor, preferably a gynecologist. Less common symptoms include fatigue, indigestion, back pain, pain with intercourse, constipation, and menstrual irregularities.

Early stage diagnosis is associated with improved prognosis.

American Cancer Society. (2016). Ovarian Cancer. Retrieved from <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/ovariancancer/index>

Foundation for Women's Cancer. (2015). Understanding Ovarian Cancer: A Woman's Guide. Retrieved from <http://www.foundationforwomenscancer.org/wp-content/uploads/Understanding-Ovarian-Cancer-2015.pdf>

Foundation for Women's Cancer. (2012). Understanding Your Risk of Ovarian Cancer: A Woman's Guide. Retrieved from http://www.foundationforwomenscancer.org/wp-content/uploads/Understanding_Risk_of_Ovarian_Cancer.pdf

HOW DO I KNOW MY RISK?

Ultimately you must talk to your doctor to fully understand your individual risk for ovarian or any other cancer. The descriptions in the following Table provide some useful information to help you with that conversation.

RISK PROFILE	RECOMMENDATIONS
General Risk (1 in 70 women at this level will have ovarian cancer in her lifetime). You have... <ul style="list-style-type: none">No family history of breast or ovarian cancer.No difficulty getting pregnant.Never taken hormone replacement therapy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Have a gynecological exam once a year.Talk to your doctor immediately if you experience any of the ovarian cancer symptoms described in this brochure on a daily basis for 2-3 weeks.
Slightly Increased Risk (up to 1 in 20 women at this level will have ovarian cancer in her lifetime). You have any of the following... <ul style="list-style-type: none">A history of difficulty getting pregnant.A history of endometriosis.Taken hormone replacement therapy to help manage menopausal symptoms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Have a gynecological exam once a year.Talk to your doctor immediately if you experience any of the ovarian cancer symptoms described in this brochure on a daily basis for 2-3 weeks.Consider using birth control pills, after speaking with your doctor, if you are in the reproductive age group and have not had breast cancer.
Moderately Increased Risk (up to 1 in 10 women at this level will have ovarian cancer in her lifetime). You have any of the following... <ul style="list-style-type: none">A close blood relation (i.e. mother, sister, daughter, grandmother, granddaughter, aunt or niece), on either your mother's or father's side of the family, who has had ovarian cancer at any age.Personally had breast cancer before age 45,Personally had breast cancer before age 50 and have at least one close relative who has had breast cancer prior to age 50 or ovarian cancer at any age.Two or more close relatives on the same side of the family (either your mother's or father's) that have had breast cancer before age 50 or ovarian cancer at any age.Eastern European (Ashkenazi) Jewish ancestry and you or a close relative, on either side of your family, has had breast cancer before age 50 or ovarian cancer at any age.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Have a gynecological exam once a year.Talk to your doctor immediately if you experience any of the ovarian cancer symptoms described in this brochure on a daily basis for 2-3 weeks.Consider using birth control pills, after speaking with your doctor, if you are in the reproductive age group and have not had breast cancer.Talk to your doctor about genetic counseling and possibly genetic testing to help determine the best screening and prevention strategies.
Very Increased Risk (up to 1 in 2 women at this level will have ovarian cancer in her lifetime). You have had... <ul style="list-style-type: none">Genetic testing indicating you have a cancer causing change (mutation) in either the <i>BRCA1</i> or <i>BRCA2</i> gene.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Have a gynecological exam one to two times per year.Talk to your doctor immediately if you experience any of the ovarian cancer symptoms described in this brochure on a daily basis for 2-3 weeks.Consider using birth control pills, after speaking with your doctor, if you are in the reproductive age group and have not had breast cancer.Have both annual mammograms and annual breast MRIs beginning at age 25-30.Have both a transvaginal ultrasound and the CA125 blood test two times per year starting at age 30-35 until the ovaries and fallopian tubes are removed preventively.

Know the risks

Know the symptoms

Listen to your body

Talk with your doctor

Early detection of ovarian cancer can lead to better outcomes.

Adopted from Foundation for Women's Cancer and Project Hope for Ovarian Cancer Research and Education. (2011). *Are you at Risk for Ovarian Cancer? A Woman's Guide*. Retrieved from http://www.foundationforwomenscancer.org/wp-content/uploads/Are-you-at-risk-for-ovarian-cancer_brochure.pdf