

OVARIAN CANCER: THE FACTS

WHAT IS OVARIAN CANCER?

Ovarian cancer is a cancer that affects a woman's ovaries. Around 90 per cent of ovarian cancers start on the outer covering of the ovary. This is known as epithelial ovarian cancer.

Ovarian cancer is a relatively uncommon disease, affecting only about 1200 women each year in Australia. Eight hundred women die of the disease each year.

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR OVARIAN CANCER?

While we don't know exactly what causes ovarian cancer, the evidence shows that increasing age is a well-established risk factor for the disease, with around 80 per cent of cases occurring in women aged 50 years and over.

A small number of women (around 5-10 per cent of all cases) will be at increased risk because they have a family history of ovarian cancer. Their risk increases with the number of relatives who have developed the disease.



**NATIONAL
BREAST AND OVARIAN
CANCER CENTRE**

www.nbocc.org.au

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF OVARIAN CANCER AND WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Symptoms of ovarian cancer are often vague and can mimic those of other disorders. This can make ovarian cancer difficult to diagnose in its early stages. A Pap smear cannot be used to detect ovarian cancer.

The best thing women can do is to be aware of the symptoms that may indicate ovarian cancer and see their GP if they experience any unusual and persistent changes.

The most common symptoms that may indicate ovarian cancer are:

- abdominal bloating/feeling full
- appetite loss
- unexplained weight gain
- constipation
- heartburn
- back pain
- frequent urination
- abdominal/pelvic pain
- fatigue.

These symptoms can also be present in other illnesses. It is important that you have any unusual or persistent symptoms investigated. In order to establish the cause of your symptoms your GP may refer you for further tests such as an ultrasound.

For more information go to
www.ovariancancerprogram.org.au

Produced by the National Breast Cancer Centre* 2006
Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.