

OVARIAN CANCER AWARENESS MONTH



All you need to know about ovarian cancer, its symptoms, risk factors and support available



What is ovarian cancer?

Ovarian cancer is a disease that can disrupt the normal function of ovaries which are part of the reproductive system. The ovaries are two small, oval-shaped organs in the pelvis that have two main functions. Firstly, they produce and store eggs for reproduction. Secondly, they produce the female sex hormones oestrogen and progesterone.

Ovarian cancer occurs when abnormal cells within the ovary start to multiply, creating a tumour. Not all tumours are cancerous and non-cancerous tumours are called benign tumours. They don't usually spread to other parts of the body. Benign tumours may need treatment but they're rarely life threatening. Malignant ovarian tumours, however, are cancerous and can grow enough to engulf most of the ovary and can also spread to other parts of the body.

Ovarian cancer is the sixth most common cancer in women with around 7,000 new cases diagnosed in the UK each year*





What are the risk factors?

The exact cause of ovarian cancer is unknown, but there are some factors that can increase the risk of getting it:

- Age

As with many other types of cancer, ovarian cancer becomes more common as women get older. The risk of getting it increases from around 45 years and is greatest in those women aged between 75 and 79 years.

- Inherited faulty genes

Inherited genes that increase the risk of ovarian cancer include faulty versions of BRCA1 and BRCA2. Cancer Research UK estimates that between 5 and 15 out of 100 ovarian cancers are caused by an inherited faulty gene.

- Hormone replacement therapy (HRT)

Using HRT after the menopause may increase the risk of ovarian cancer. According to Cancer Research UK, 4% ovarian cancers are linked to hormone replacement therapy (HRT) use in the UK.

- Previous cancer

There's an increased risk of ovarian cancer if a woman had breast cancer in the past. Also, women who had bowel cancer at a young age have an increased risk of ovarian cancer compared to the general population.

Other risk factors include: smoking, being overweight or obese, as well as exposure to asbestos.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of ovarian cancer are not always easy to recognise because they're similar to those of some more common conditions, such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). The main symptoms of ovarian cancer include:

- a long-lasting bloated or swollen tummy
- loss of appetite
- feeling full quickly when you eat
- pain in the lower tummy area or back
- passing urine more often than usual
- passing urine more urgently (feeling like you can't hold on).

Other ovarian cancer symptoms may include:

- a change in your normal bowel habit (diarrhoea or constipation)
- weight gain or weight loss
- unexplained or extreme tiredness (fatigue)
- vaginal bleeding after your menopause.

Contact your GP if your symptoms are severe, persistent or frequent, especially if you have been feeling bloated more than 12 times a month. It's a good idea to use [symptoms diary](#) to keep a record of what symptoms you are experiencing so you can communicate them clearly to your GP.



Where to get support?

[The Ovacome Support Line](#)

The support line offers information and emotional support on all aspects of ovarian cancer. You can call them on 07503 682 311 or Freephone 0800 008 7054. Calls to the Freephone are free on all mobile networks and from all consumer landlines. Available Monday–Friday 10am–5pm.

You can also request [1-to-1 Zoom call](#) with a member of their team who will be able to answer any questions, talk through your worries and support you every step of the way. You can request the call by completing the form and a member of the staff will get in touch with you.

[Ovacome's Community Language Support Service](#)

Service created for anyone from diverse communities whose first language isn't English. It enables people who have been diagnosed with ovarian cancer, or have symptoms they are concerned about, to speak to someone in their preferred language. The service has dedicated phone lines that provide support and information in:

Arabic: 0121 647 6630

Bengali: 0121 647 6631

Gujarati: 0121 647 6632

Polish: 0121 647 6633

Punjabi: 0121 647 6634

Urdu: 0121 647 6635





[Local Support Groups](#)

Here you can find a list of support groups and cancer centres in your local area that offer a safe space for women affected by cancer to share their experiences and emotions with others in similar situations. Due to the current situation with COVID-19, many face-to-face support groups are not taking place. However, it is possible that some groups may be running online so it's worth getting in touch with the group organisers.

[My Ovacome Forum](#)

My Ovacome forum is an online community for women affected by ovarian cancer where they can share their experiences and offer each other encouragement and support. Also, Ovacome's team contribute to the forum by providing help and information on ovarian cancer. My Ovacome community has over 13,700 members.

[Target Ovarian Cancer Support Line](#)

If you need more information on something specific, or just want to chat, you can call this support line on 020 7923 5475 from 9am until 5.30pm, Monday to Friday. The specialist nurses can provide support and cover all aspects of ovarian cancer and its treatment.

[Macmillan Support Line](#)

You can call Macmillan Support Line for free on 0808 808 00 00, 7 days a week, 8am-8pm. It offers confidential support to people living with cancer and their loved ones.



Additional resources

- [Ovarian Cancer Information Hub](#)

Provides information for women who are currently receiving treatment for ovarian cancer and living in England.

- [Target Ovarian Cancer's guides and information materials](#)

Target Ovarian Cancer has prepared various publications and guides offering expert advice, practical information and emotional support.

- [Cancer Research UK's Information Hub](#)

Provides comprehensive information on types of ovarian cancer, diagnosis, treatment, research and clinical trials.

- [Ovarian cancer awareness videos and leaflets in other languages](#)

Ovacome has created a number of helpful leaflets and short informative films in Polish, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati and Arabic in order to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer among people from diverse communities.



References

[Cancer Research UK](#)

[NHS](#)

[Macmillan Cancer Support](#)

[Ovarian Cancer Action](#)

[Target Ovarian Cancer](#)

[Ovacome](#)

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