

# A Woman's Risk of Getting Ovarian Cancer during Her Lifetime

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## Editorial Note

The ovaries are small organs that make female hormones and eggs. Women usually have two small ovaries, one on each side of your uterus. Ovarian cancer is the most common cause of cancer death from gynecologic tumors in the world. Malignant ovarian lesions include primary lesions arising from normal structures within the ovary and secondary lesions from cancers arising elsewhere in the body. Primary lesions include epithelial ovarian carcinoma that is 70% of all ovarian malignancies. Current research suggests that the majority of these originate from the fallopian tubes. Stromal tumors of the ovary include germ cell tumors, sex cord stromal tumors, and other more rare types. Metastases to the ovaries are relatively frequent common sources are tumors in the endometrium, breast, colon, stomach, and cervix.

For some, the risk of being diagnosed with ovarian cancer is high because of an abnormality in a gene that has been inherited. This is called a gene mutation. Most women at high risk of ovarian cancer carry the breast cancer gene mutation, but some other gene mutations such as those causing Lynch syndrome also increase the risk of ovarian cancer. For women who are at high inherited risk of ovarian cancer, a surgical procedure called Risk reducing bilateral oophorectomy has been proven to reduce this risk.

### Symptoms

Many people with ovarian cancer have no symptoms until the cancer has spread beyond the ovary. The initial symptoms are similar to gastrointestinal illness and indigestion, making the disease hard to diagnose. Symptoms of ovarian cancer are common in women for many other conditions. For this reason, many women are not diagnosed until late in the development of ovarian cancer.

Signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer may include, abdominal bloating, feeling full quickly after eating, pelvic or abdominal pain, changes in bladder function, urinary frequency or urgency, difficulty eating, general abdominal discomfort and pain, nausea, diarrhea, constipation, loss of appetite, weight gain or loss with no known reason, abnormal bleeding from the vagina may occur as a late symptom.

Just because you experience these symptoms does not mean you have ovarian cancer, but you should see your doctor for an evaluation particularly if these symptoms are severe or persistent.

Ovarian tumors can form in infants, young girls, and adolescents on one or both ovaries. Doctors do not completely understand the cause of most ovarian tumors. While ovarian tumors often occur with no known cause,

there are some risk factors including inherited gene mutations, breast cancer gene, family history of ovarian cancer, previous cancer diagnosis.

Ovarian tumors account for one percent of all malignant tumors found in children. In girls younger than eight, four out of five ovarian tumors are benign. Ovarian tumors are different from ovarian cysts. Tumors are solid masses of tissue, while cysts contain fluid, tissues, or other materials. Some ovarian cysts can become malignant. Non-functional cysts, which do not go away on their own and are not associated with a woman producing an egg each month, can become malignant.

In children and adolescents, ovarian tumors have a much higher cure rate than adult forms of ovarian cancer. Experts don't know exactly what causes ovarian cancer. But they do know that DNA changes play a role in many cancers. After diagnosis, a doctor will suggest one or more options for treatment. The type of treatment depends on the type of cancer and the stage of the disease. If surgery has not been performed yet, the exact stage may not be known. The main treatments for ovarian cancer are surgery, chemotherapy and radiation or a combination of the three.

### Germ Cell Ovarian Tumors

Germ cell ovarian tumors begin in the ovarian cells that develop into eggs. They are rare and usually affect girls and young women up to the age of thirty. Non-cancerous teratomas are the most common type. You have to go through surgery to remove the tumor. You might have chemotherapy if your tumor is cancerous. Treatment usually works well and most women are cured. There are different types of tumor which develop in ovarian germ cells. These tumors can be non-cancerous or cancerous. Mature teratomas are the most common type of ovarian germ cell tumor. They are non-cancerous. Mature teratoma is also often called a dermoid cyst. They are most common in women during their reproductive years.

Endometriosis is a non-cancerous condition in which endometrial type tissue can grow into areas of the body other than the uterus, including the ovaries. These tumors can occur in both ovaries and grow to a large size. Clear cell carcinoma is linked to endometriosis in at least 50% of cases. They are more commonly diagnosed at an early stage as compared to serous carcinoma, but are likewise considered high-grade tumors.

Mixed carcinomas are made up of more than one type of cell. A common combination is clear cell carcinoma mixed with endometrioid carcinoma. Both cell types are linked to endometriosis. Undifferentiated carcinoma refers to tumors that start in epithelial cells but cannot be grouped into any type of epithelial ovarian carcinoma. This is because the cells no longer resemble those of the other types. They tend to grow and spread more quickly than the other types of epithelial ovarian carcinoma. Malignant mesodermal mixed tumors grow quickly and are usually large. This cancer is usually diagnosed at a later stage.

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