



**YOU  
NEED  
TO  
KNOW**

## ***Persistently bloated?***

***Change in bowel or eating habits? It could be ovarian cancer.  
Tell your doctor. Get it checked.***

***All the information you need to know***

***You Need to Know*** is a campaign to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer. This leaflet will help you recognise possible symptoms and explain the importance of getting checked by a doctor. These symptoms may be nothing serious, but it is always best to speak to a doctor.

***Ovarian cancer is a cancer that affects the ovaries and fallopian tubes.***

### **What are ovaries?**

The ovaries are small, oval-shaped organs located on either side of your uterus (womb). They produce and store your eggs (also called ova) which are released as part of a woman's menstrual cycle. They make hormones called oestrogen and progesterone.

### **What is ovarian cancer?**

Ovarian cancer happens when abnormal cells in and around the ovary and fallopian tubes grow and divide uncontrollably.

Ovarian cancer is the 6th most common cancer for women in the UK, according to Cancer Research UK.

### **What are the symptoms of ovarian cancer?**

- ♥ **Increased abdominal size and persistent bloating (not bloating that comes and goes)**
- ♥ **Persistent pelvic and abdominal pain**
- ♥ **Unexplained change in bowel habits**
- ♥ **Difficulty eating and feeling full quickly, or feeling nauseous**
- ♥ **Needing to urinate (wee) more regularly**

Other symptoms are back pain, feeling tired and weight loss. Some of the symptoms of ovarian cancer are often the same as for other conditions, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS), so it can be difficult to recognise the symptoms in the early stages. A woman wouldn't necessarily get all of these symptoms. If you have any of these symptoms, it doesn't mean it is anything serious, but you need to get checked by a doctor. If anything is found, then the earlier it's treated, the more successful treatment is.

We don't know exactly what causes ovarian cancer, but some factors may increase the risk of it developing, including:

### **Age**

While ovarian cancer can happen to anyone with ovaries at any age, the risk of developing ovarian cancer increases with age. According to NHS research, more than half of all cases in the UK are in women aged 65 and over.<sup>i</sup>

### **Ethnicity**

Rates for ovarian cancer are lower in the Asian and Black ethnic groups, and in people of mixed or multiple ethnicities, compared with the White ethnic group, according to Cancer Research UK.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Family history / inherited gene alterations**

A family history of ovarian or breast cancer can increase the risk. This can be the result of changes on certain genes (called alterations or mutations). The most common gene alterations are on the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes. About 2 in 10 ovarian cancers may be caused by a gene alteration.

It is still possible to get ovarian cancer even if you've had your ovaries removed as it can develop in the fallopian tubes.

There are a few other risk factors which may increase your chance of developing ovarian cancer. These include being overweight, smoking, exposure to asbestos, radiation exposure, endometriosis, being diabetic and use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

<sup>i</sup> NHS. Main causes of ovarian cancer [Last Accessed:28.10.2024] [www.nhs.uk/conditions/ovarian-cancer/causes/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/ovarian-cancer/causes/)

<sup>ii</sup> Cancer Research UK. Ovarian Cancer Incidence. [Last Accessed: 28.10.2024] [www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/ovarian-cancer](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/ovarian-cancer)

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## **What should I do if I experience any symptoms of ovarian cancer**

Book an appointment with your GP. Some may not find it easy to talk to a doctor about gynae health concerns, but there are things you can do to help make the experience easier. You can request:

- ✔ **A female GP**
- ✔ **A GP that specialises in women's health**
- ✔ **Someone who can speak your language**
- ✔ **An interpreter**
- ✔ **For a family, friend or carer to join you**

It's a good idea to keep a diary of your symptoms (when they occur, how bad they are, how long they last and how they affect you), to help you explain them to the GP during the appointment.

## **What happens at the appointment?**

Many GP appointments are done over the phone or online, but you can ask for a face-to-face appointment.

Your GP will ask you some questions about your symptoms and they may want to examine you (feel your tummy). After your examination, your GP will talk to you about what happens next. This could be some blood tests, an ultrasound scan of your tummy and/or a referral to the hospital to see a gynaecologist. This is usually within 2 weeks if your GP thinks your symptoms could be caused by a cancer.

A gynaecologist is an expert in diagnosing and treating gynaecological problems.

After the appointment, it is important to continue keeping a diary of your symptoms. If they don't go away or get worse, do visit your doctor again and let them know.

## **Where can I go for more information?**

For more information about the 'You Need to Know' campaign, visit: [gmcancer.org.uk/campaign-resource-centre](http://gmcancer.org.uk/campaign-resource-centre)

For more information on ovarian cancer, visit gynaecological cancer charity The Eve Appeal: [www.eveappeal.org.uk/ovarian](http://www.eveappeal.org.uk/ovarian)

The Eve Appeal has a service called Ask Eve, where you can speak to a gynae nurse about gynaecological cancers, their symptoms, and any worries you may have. Ask Eve has an interpretation service available in over 250 languages.

**Call The Eve Appeal on 0808 802 0019  
or email [nurse@eveappeal.org.uk](mailto:nurse@eveappeal.org.uk)**