



OVARIAN CANCER PREVENTION AND SCREENING

Cancer Prevention Series 10

Ovarian cancer is a malignant tumour formed in the ovaries.

Am I at risk of ovarian cancer?

Risk factors for ovarian cancer include:

- Family history of ovarian cancer, especially with an affected first-degree relative (mother or sister)
- Confirmed carrier of certain gene mutations, such as *BRCA1/2* or Lynch syndrome
- Family history of breast cancer
- Use of hormonal replacement therapy
- Being overweight or obese
- No childbirth
- Occupational exposure to asbestos
- Tobacco smoking

What are the common symptoms of ovarian cancer?

The symptoms of ovarian cancer are not easily noticed in its early stage. Common symptoms include:

- Pelvic or abdominal pain
- Need to urinate more urgently than normal or more often
- Persistent and marked sense of bloating
- Difficult eating or feeling full quickly when eating

You should consult a doctor as soon as possible if you develop any of the above symptoms.

How to reduce the chance of getting ovarian cancer?

- Maintain a healthy body weight and waist circumference by having regular physical activities and balanced diet
- Breastfeed each child for longer duration as far as practical
- Adhere to occupational safety and health rules (e.g. proper use of protective equipment) to reduce exposure to asbestos in the workplace
- Avoid or quit smoking
- Although oral contraceptives (OC) has been reported to have decreased the risk of developing ovarian cancer, women considering taking OC for ovarian cancer prevention should first discuss with the doctor the potential risks and benefits

What is ovarian cancer screening?

The purpose of cancer screening is to detect cancer before it gives rise to symptoms, so that early treatment can be initiated.

Regarding ovarian cancer screening, the two screening modalities that are more commonly assessed are transvaginal ultrasound (TVUS) and CA125 blood test.

However, no scientific evidence so far has proven that screening with TVUS and CA125 blood test, alone or in combination, can pick up ovarian cancer at an early stage or decrease the death rate.

In addition, screening tests have their limitations; they are not 100% accurate and can lead to false-positive and false-negative results.

Should I get screened?

At present, screening for ovarian cancer is not recommended in asymptomatic women at average risk.

Women at increased risk, such as with strong family history of ovarian/breast cancer or inherited deleterious gene mutations (e.g. *BRCA1/2*, Lynch syndrome), should consider seeking advice from doctors for assessment of their ovarian cancer risk and the need for and approach of screening.



Department of Health