

ASCO ANSWERS

OVARIAN CANCER

WHAT IS OVARIAN CANCER?

Ovarian cancer is a disease in which normal cells in an ovary begin to change, grow uncontrollably, and form a mass of cells called a tumor. Epithelial carcinoma, which begins in cells on the outer surface of the ovary, is the most common type of ovarian cancer. Ovarian cancer is the eighth most common type of cancer diagnosed in women in the United States.

WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF THE OVARIES?

Every woman has two ovaries, the almond-shaped glands that contain the eggs. During ovulation, an egg is released from an ovary and travels to the uterus through the fallopian tube. The ovaries are the primary source of estrogen and progesterone, the hormones that influence breast growth, body shape, and body hair, and regulate the menstrual cycle and pregnancy.

WHAT DOES STAGE MEAN?

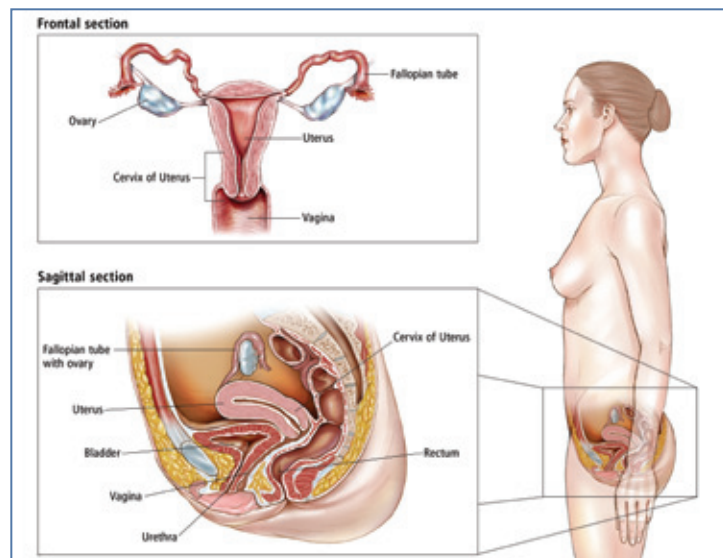
The stage is a way of describing a cancer, such as where it is located, if or where it has spread, and if it is affecting the functions of other organs in the body. There are four stages for ovarian cancer: stages I through IV (one through four). Illustrations for these stages are available at www.cancer.net/ovarian.

HOW IS OVARIAN CANCER TREATED?

The treatment of ovarian cancer depends on the size and location of the tumor, whether the cancer has spread, and the woman's overall health. Surgery is the first treatment and may include the removal of the ovaries, fallopian tubes, and uterus. Chemotherapy may be given to lower the risk of cancer returning and/or treat metastatic cancer. Radiation therapy is not often used to treat ovarian cancer but may be used to relieve the side effects of cancer growth. When making treatment decisions, women may also consider a clinical trial; talk with your doctor about all treatment options. The side effects of ovarian cancer treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health care team.

HOW CAN I COPE WITH OVARIAN CANCER?

Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your doctor are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, becoming organized, and considering a second opinion are other steps. Take care of yourself during this time. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.



Find additional cancer information at www.cancer.net.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE DOCTOR

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your health care. Consider asking the following questions of your doctors:

- What type of ovarian cancer do I have?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- What stage is the ovarian cancer?
- Has cancer spread to my lymph nodes or anywhere else?
- Would you explain my treatment options? What clinical trials are open to me?
- How will this treatment benefit me?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- If I'm worried about the cost related to my cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?
- Will this treatment affect my ability to become pregnant or have children?
- What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom do I call for questions or problems?
- Is there anything else I should be asking?

Additional questions to ask the doctor can be found at www.cancer.net/ovarian.

Information in ASCO's patient education materials is not intended as medical advice or as a substitute for the treating doctor's own professional judgment; nor does it imply ASCO endorsement of any product, service, or company.

ASCO believes that all treatment decisions should be made between patients and their doctors.

**For more information, visit ASCO's patient website,
www.cancer.net, or call 888-651-3038.**

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TERMS TO KNOW

Benign:

A tumor that is not cancerous

Bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy:

Removal of both ovaries and fallopian tubes

Biopsy:

Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to check for cancer cells

CA-125:

A substance, called a tumor marker, that may be at higher levels in women with ovarian cancer and is measured with a blood test

Chemotherapy:

The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

Hysterectomy:

Removal of the uterus

Lymph node:

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Malignant:

A tumor that is cancerous

Metastasis:

The spread of cancer from where the cancer began to another part of the body

Oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy:

The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

Tumor:

A mass of tissue that requires a biopsy