

## Ovarian Cancer March 2012



### What is Ovarian Cancer?

This type of cancer can develop in one or both ovaries. The ovaries are the part of the female reproductive system that produces eggs and the hormones that regulate fertility.

### How common is it?

Cancer of the ovary affects over 6,500 women in the UK each year. It is the fifth most common cancer among women after breast cancer, bowel cancer, lung cancer and cancer of the uterus (womb). Ovarian cancer is most common in women who have had the menopause (usually over the age of 45), but it can affect women of any age.

### Symptoms of ovarian cancer

Many women don't have any symptoms or only vague symptoms in the early stages of ovarian cancer. Many of the symptoms listed below can occur in other conditions as well and are not necessarily a sign of cancer:

- stomach pain or pain in your pelvis
- a persistent bloated feeling
- feeling full quickly and losing your appetite.

Other possible symptoms include:

- unexplained weight loss
- swelling of your abdomen
- changes in bowel or bladder habits – constipation, excess wind, diarrhoea or needing to pass urine more often
- back pain
- extreme tiredness
- rarely, abnormal vaginal bleeding.

These symptoms aren't always caused by ovarian cancer but if you have them, or you're in any doubt, see your GP. The earlier you are diagnosed, the better your chance of survival.

### Causes of ovarian cancer

The exact reasons why you may develop ovarian cancer aren't fully understood at present. However, there are some things that can make it more likely. It's more common in women who live in developed countries for example, those who have gone through the menopause, and there may be a genetic element in some cases.

Other factors that may increase your risk of getting ovarian cancer include:

- certain types of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) – especially if you take them for longer than five years
- being overweight or obese
- having endometriosis or ovarian cysts

- smoking
- starting the menopause late.

Ovarian cancer is generally less common in women who have:

- used the contraceptive pill
- had children – the more children, the lower the risk
- breastfed their children
- had a hysterectomy or been sterilised.

### Treatment of ovarian cancer

Treatment for ovarian cancer usually involves a combination of surgery and chemotherapy. Your treatment will depend on the type of ovarian cancer you have and how far it has spread.

### Outlook

There is no national screening programme for ovarian cancer.

A cervical screening test (smear test) **cannot** detect ovarian cancer.

As with most types of cancer, the outlook depends largely on how far the cancer has advanced by the time it is diagnosed and your age at diagnosis. Ninety per cent of women diagnosed with early stage ovarian cancer will be alive in five years time (the five year survival rate).

## Update On Health Promotion News: Issue No: 01/2012 – Cervical Cancer

### Screening for cervical cancer

Early detection and treatment can prevent **7 out of 10 cases** of this cancer. In Northern Ireland, screening is offered to all women aged **25-64**. This is the age group where screening is of most benefit. Women will automatically be invited every three years if aged 25-49, and every five years if aged 50-64. If you haven't received your invitation, or if you have any cause for concern, you should talk to your GP.

Screening can be done by a doctor or nurse at your GP practice or family planning clinic

### Further Information and advice:

[www.nicsohs.gov.uk](http://www.nicsohs.gov.uk)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

[www.bupa.co.uk/individuals/health-information](http://www.bupa.co.uk/individuals/health-information)

[www.ulstercancer.org](http://www.ulstercancer.org)

[www.actioncancer.org](http://www.actioncancer.org)

[www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)

