

## Ovarian cancer facts

This leaflet is about ovarian cancer, its symptoms and the things that affect your risk of developing the disease.

Ovarian cancer is the fifth most common cancer in women in the UK, and mainly affects older women.

When ovarian cancer is found early, it is easier to treat and there is a better chance of survival. If you have any of the symptoms mentioned in this leaflet, they happen again and again, and you first noticed them in the last few months, it is best to see your doctor.

### How common is it?

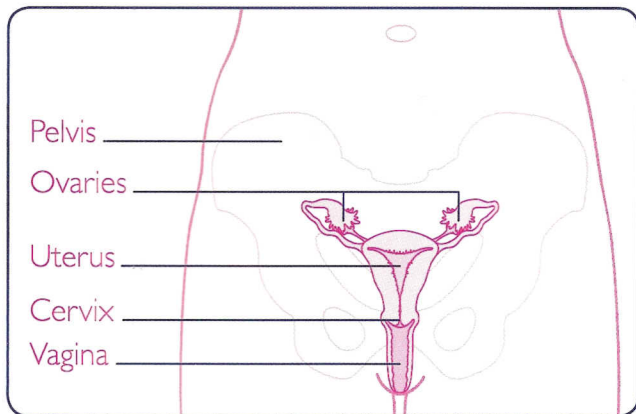
Around one woman in every 50 will develop ovarian cancer over her lifetime. It mainly affects older women – more than four out of five cases are in women over 50.

## The ovaries

The ovaries are part of the female reproductive system. There is one located on each side of a woman's lower tummy. Each ovary is about the size and shape of an almond.

Thousands of eggs are stored inside the ovaries. Each month an egg is released for a possible pregnancy.

The ovaries also produce hormones which control monthly menstrual cycles.





## What is ovarian cancer?

The ovaries are made up of millions of cells. Some of these cells make hormones, some surround the eggs as they develop, and others make up the outside layer of the ovary.

Cancer develops when any one of these cells starts to multiply out of control; forming a tumour. Most ovarian cancers start in cells in the outside layer of the ovary.

## Why is early detection important?

Finding cancer at an early stage gives a better chance of being treated successfully. In the early stages of ovarian cancer, cancer cells will only exist within the ovaries. At later stages, cancer cells can spread to other parts of the body such as the bowel, liver or lung, making it harder to treat.

Seven in 10 people survive ovarian cancer if it is detected at an early stage. But at present, only one in five cases is diagnosed at this stage. That is why it is important to know what to look out for, and not to ignore any symptoms.

## What are the symptoms of ovarian cancer?

Many women with ovarian cancer notice changes to their body, particularly around their tummy area. These changes can include:

- pelvic or tummy pain
- increased tummy size
- bloating that does not go away
- difficulty eating or feeling full quickly.

Lots of women experience symptoms similar to these and usually they are nothing serious. But you should see your doctor if they:

- happen again and again – several times a month
- are new for you – you first noticed them in the last few months.

Other symptoms to look out for are changes in bowel habit, passing urine more often than usual, bleeding after the menopause, extreme tiredness or back pain. The most important thing is to be aware of what is normal for you so you can spot any new changes, and get them checked out early.