جمعية زهرة
ZAHRA ASSOCIATION

Ovarian Cancer
Guide

Ovarian cancer is a disease that may go undetected in its early stages, leading to many cases being discovered at late stages and negatively impacting treatment options.

What is ovarian cancer?

It is a term encompassing a group of cancers that affect the ovaries, fallopian tubes, or peritoneum. It is one of the most common cancers among women, especially after the age of 50.

Types of ovarian cancer

There are many types (more than 30) classified according to the type of cells affected. The most prominent include:

Epithelial ovarian cancer: The most common, it affects the epithelial cells lining the surface of the ovary.

Germ cell cancer: Rare, affecting reproductive cells.

Stromal cell cancer: Rare, affecting supporting tissues.

Small cell carcinoma (SCCO): Very rare, with an unknown origin for its cells.

Symptoms

Common symptoms include:

- Persistent bloating and increased abdominal size
- Loss of appetite or feeling full quickly
- Pelvic or abdominal pain
- Frequent urination

Other symptoms may include:

- Intestinal issues (diarrhea or constipation)
- Abnormal bleeding (especially after menopause)
- Extreme fatigue
- Unexplained weight loss

Note: These symptoms are similar to those of less serious conditions, which can delay diagnosis.

When to see a doctor:

- Persistent and frequent bloating (more than 12 times per month)
- Other symptoms of ovarian cancer that persist without improvement
- A family history of the disease

Stages and grades of ovarian cancer

Stages indicate how far the cancer has spread (from the ovary to other organs).

Grades indicate how fast it is growing.

The classification ranges from **Stage I** (confined to the ovary) to **Stage IV** (spread to distant organs such as the liver or lungs), and from slow-growing to fast-growing.

Global Prevalence

In 2022:

The eighth most common cancer among women.

Approximately 324,000 new cases annually, with a projected 42% increase by 2040.

Diagnosis

There is no specific screening test, and it cannot be detected by a cervical smear. Diagnosis relies on:

- Clinical examination
- Blood tests
- Medical imaging
- Biopsy (the definitive diagnostic tool)
- Risk factors
- Advancing age
- Family history
- Genetic mutations such as BRCA
- Non-pregnancy or delayed first pregnancy
- The use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) after menopause, especially estrogen
- Endometriosis
- Asbestos exposure

Note: Both CA-125 testing and transvaginal ultrasound may be used to monitor high-risk women, but it should be emphasized that they are not used as an early detection screening.

Prevention and risk reduction

- Some surgical procedures may reduce the risk but do not eliminate it entirely

- Pregnancy and breastfeeding reduce the frequency of ovulation, thus reducing the risk

- Combined oral contraceptives reduce the likelihood of developing ovarian cancer when used for extended periods, and its protective effect may persist for years after discontinuing its use

- Regular follow-up, especially for women with a family history

Relationship with breast cancer

The main link between ovarian and breast cancer is a genetic connection, particularly BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations, which affect the body's ability to repair damaged cells. Family history does not guarantee the development of ovarian cancer, but it warrants medical evaluation.

Importance of awareness

Raising awareness helps reduce late diagnosis by identifying symptoms early, thus improving the chances of successful treatment.

The earlier the disease is detected, the greater the chances of recovery, so symptoms should not be ignored or consultation with a doctor delayed.

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References :

- Ministry of Health
- Ovarian Cancer Action Association