

Fact Sheet 5

Medical terms reviewed

Ovacome is a national advice and support organisation that works to connect patients, their family and friends; provide information on treatments, screening and research; raise awareness and support and give a voice to all those affected by ovarian cancer.

Medical and other terms explained

Abdomen	Part of the body that includes the stomach, intestines and other digestive organs.
Acupuncture	Use of fine needles to control the body's flow of energy
Adjuvant Chemotherapy	Chemotherapy treatment given after another treatment, usually surgery. 'Neo-adjuvant' chemotherapy is given before other treatments, usually surgery.
Alopecia	Hair loss.
Anti-emetic drugs	Drugs to stop you feeling sick and vomiting.
Aromatherapy	Gentle massage using oils from flowers, roots and leaves.
Art therapy	A way of expressing your feelings by drawing and painting.
Ascites	Fluid that builds up in the abdomen, most commonly as a result of cancer but occasionally caused by other diseases.
Benign	Not cancerous--- used to refer to tumours which grow slowly in one place and which, once removed by surgery, tend not to come back.
Biopsy	Removal of a small piece of tissue for testing.

Bone marrow	The spongy inner part of large bones where blood cells are made.
Borderline ovarian cancer	Sometimes known as tumours of low malignant potential (LMP). Borderline tumours are neither cancerous or benign. They are growths which have some abnormal and cancer-like characteristics, but do not necessarily behave in the same way.
Cancer	Name given to a group of diseases that can occur in any organ or system in the body. They all involve abnormal cells that grow uncontrollably, and which may spread to other organs.
Carcinogen	A substance that can cause cancer.
Carcinoma	A cancer that arises from the lining of an organ or system.
Chemotherapy	Treating a disease with medication, such as cytotoxic drugs (drugs that kill cancer cells).
Counselling	A chance to talk things over with a trained counsellor, to make sense of feelings and be encouraged. This can offer new ideas for coping.
CT scan	A CT (computerised tomography) scan uses x-rays to produce images of the body.
Cytology	Examining cells under a microscope.
Diagnosis	Finding the type of disease a person is suffering from.
Dietician	A health professional who specialises in nutrition and gives people advice on how to eat sensibly to help them recover from cancer.
DNA/ (deoxyribonucleic acid)	Genetic material in all human cells that is responsible for passing on important information on cell growth, division and function.
Fine needle aspiration	Using a fine needle under local anaesthetic to take a sample of cells from a suspicious lump, to find whether or not it is cancer.

Grade of tumour	A measurement of how aggressive a tumour is. This is found by analysing the tumour under a microscope.
Gynaecological Oncologist	Doctor who specializes in gynaecological cancers.
Hickman line	A special tube inserted (under anaesthetic) through the chest into a large vein, so that chemotherapy drugs can be fed direct into the bloodstream. It can stay in place for months, meaning needles do not have to be used during treatment. It needs to be flushed through regularly and cleaned to prevent blockages and infections.
Histology	The study of the structure of tissues using a microscope and special dyes.
Hormones	Chemical substances produced by glands in the body which are carried in the blood and help control how the body works.
Immune system	The body's main defence system, which fights infections or foreign substances.
Inoperable	Refers to a cancer that cannot be removed by surgery because this might cause too much damage to normal tissue.
Intramuscular	Given by injection into a muscle.
Intravenous	Given into a vein by injection or infusion (given slowly through a small tube).
Isotope scan	A scan which involves injecting a very weak radioactive substance, which collects in the organ being investigated so that it can be seen more easily with a special camera.
Laparoscopy	A minor operation which involves making a small cut in the abdomen so that a telescope (laparoscope) can be inserted to examine the abdomen.
Laparotomy	An operation to open the abdomen. A staging laparotomy is an abdominal operation to see the extent of the cancer.

Lymphatic system	A network of vessels that carries lymph (a clear fluid that comes from the blood and coats the tissues). Lymph contains water, protein, minerals and white blood cells. The lymph passes through a series of filters – the lymph nodes – before it rejoins the bloodstream.
Lymph nodes or glands	These are small pearl-like glands that are connected to the lymph system and act as filters to bacteria or cancer cells. They also produce lymphocytes which are one type of white blood cells. Bacteria or cancer cells may collect in the lymph nodes and can cause these nodes to get bigger.
Lymphoedema	Swelling in the arms or legs caused by blockage or damage to the lymphatic system. It may occur as a result of treating the cancer or by the cancer blocking the lymphatic system.
Malignant	Malignant tumours are able to spread to and destroy surrounding tissues and other organs in the body.
Metastasis	Cancer that has spread from one part of the body to another. This usually happens through the lymphatic system or bloodstream. (also called secondaries.)
MRI scan	A MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scanner uses a magnetic field and radio waves to build up detailed pictures of various parts of the body, from the signals that are sent out from the water molecules in the body. Computer systems help, but no x-rays are used.
MDT	Multidisciplinary team - several members of different hospital departments who meet to discuss the treatment plan for individual patients.
Nadir point	Means low point in reference to white blood cells and platelets. Usually occurs about 10 days after treatment, depending on the drugs given.
Nausea	Feeling sick.
Omentum	A sheet of fat in the abdomen that protects the intestines.

Omentectomy	Surgical removal of omentum.
Oncology	The study of cancer.
Oncologist	A doctor who specialises in treating cancer. A clinical oncologist or radiotherapist specialises in treating cancer with radiation and a medical oncologist specialises in treating cancer with medicine.
Palliative care	Care that treats the symptoms of the disease but is not aimed at curing the disease.
Pathology	The branch of medicine that deals with examining parts of the body affected by disease.
PICC	Peripherally inserted central catheter – a long, thin, flexible tube which is inserted into one of the large veins of the arm until the tip sits just above the heart.
Porto-catheter	Sometimes called an implantable port or subcutaneous port. A soft plastic tube is put into a vein in a patient's chest or arm and has an opening just under the skin. It makes it possible for medicines to be given into the vein. Blood samples may be taken via this port.
Primary cancer	The first cancerous tumour to develop in a particular part of the body.
Prognosis	How the disease is expected to progress and what the outcome is likely to be.
Progressive disease	Cancer that has spread.
Prophylactic	Treatment given to prevent an illness or stop it from coming back.
Radiographer	A member of the health-care team who takes and analyses x-rays and scans.
Radiologist	A specialist doctor who uses x-rays, scans and other images to treat a disease.
Radiotherapist	The member of the health-care team who gives patients radiotherapy.

Reflexology	A complementary therapy where the therapist applies gentle pressure to specific acupuncture points on the feet or hands in order to link with the organs and systems in the body.
Refractory disease	Cancer that has not responded to treatment.
Remission	When cancer treatment has been successful and there is no trace of cancer apparent.
Resistant disease	Cancer which at first seems to respond to treatment, but quickly returns and is thought not to have been fully corrected by the treatment.
Secondaries	When a tumour comes back in a different part of the body from where it started, or spreads. (This is also called metastasis.)
Shiatsu	A type of massage working on the flow of energy, through the body, used as a relaxation technique.
Staging	The process for deciding how far the cancer has spread, by using internationally recognised and agreed standards. This can be done using x-rays, scans, blood tests or surgery.
Subcutaneous injection	An injection given just under the skin and not into the muscle.
Syringe driver or pump	A way of giving medication under the skin slowly and continuously without having to give several injections.
TAHBSO	Total abdominal hysterectomy and bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy. This is when the uterus, including the cervix, fallopian tubes and ovaries, is removed.
Terminal care	Caring for a person who is dying, to make sure they are as comfortable and pain-free as possible.
Therapy	Another word for treatment.
Thoracic	Referring to the chest area.
Trans-vaginal ultrasound scan	Using sound waves to build up a picture of organs inside the body, through a probe placed in the vagina.

Tumour	A lump or group of cells which may or may not be cancer. Also known as neoplasm
Tumour markers	Substances produced by some cancers that can be found in the blood. These can be used to find a cancer (screening), to see if the treatment is being successful, or to watch and see if a disease comes back (monitoring). The marker for ovarian cancer is CA125.
Ultrasound scan	Using sound waves to build up a picture of organs inside the body, through a probe placed on the abdomen.
Venflon	A tiny plastic tube which is placed in a vein so that drugs and fluids can go direct into the bloodstream.
Visualisation	A relaxation technique which relies on the power of the mind. A particular image in your mind can be changed to a positive one in order to relax and heal.
Yoga	A combination of breathing techniques and exercise which helps with relaxation and relief of stress, whilst increasing blood circulation and mobility.

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If you would like more information or if you would like to discuss anything about ovarian cancer, please phone our supportline on 0845 371 0554 Monday to Friday between 10.00 hrs and 17.00hrs. Alternatively, please visit our website at www.ovacome.org.uk.

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