

PRESS RELEASE

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BEAT OVARIAN CANCER SYMPTOMS CHECKER GETS FUNDING FROM NHS

The first ever web-based ovarian cancer checker, developed by Ovacome to speed diagnosis by helping women to describe their symptoms accurately, will go live on the NHS Choices website today

For the first time, under the BEAT Ovarian Cancer campaign, launched today, women with symptoms that can be vague and non-specific such as bloating; eating less and feeling fuller; as well abdominal and or pelvic pain or discomfort, will be able to accurately record the severity and persistence of the symptoms on an easy-to-use online tool.

The online widget is accessed from the NHS Choices, Netmums, Macmillan or Ovacome website. Then it will prompt the user to record their symptoms every day. Each symptom is scored by severity.

The software in the tool will be preloaded with a set of descriptors for each symptom identified in a 400 ovarian cancer patient survey, the biggest ever, undertaken by Ovacome in 2006.

BEAT Symptom Tracker

Bloating symptoms | Eating difficulties | Abdominal pain | Other symptoms | Family history

Do you have bloating symptoms?
If you feel you are experiencing one or more of these bloating symptoms below, select an appropriate answer from the drop down list.

	Do you have this?	If so, for how long?
Abdominal bloating <i>Belly feels noticeably fuller and tighter or as if it's pressured or full of gas</i>	Yes - Mild to moderate	Within a week
Bigger than usual abdomen <i>Size of belly feels bigger than usual</i>	Yes - Moderate	Within a month
Tight or hard abdomen <i>Belly feels harder than usual</i>	Yes - Severe	More than six months
Can feel lumps in abdomen <i>Any unusual lumps or bumps in your belly not noticed before</i>	Yes - Mild Yes - Mild to moderate Yes - Moderate Yes - Moderate to severe Yes - Severe	Not applicable

BACK NEXT

Women are taken through a step-by-step questionnaire about their symptoms.

The questions refer to symptoms that are typical of ovarian cancer – bloating, eating less and abdominal pain.

Women record the frequency and severity of symptoms by selecting from the straight forward drop-down options.

At any point, the patient can print the summary list of symptoms which record which symptoms were experienced; when; and for how long; and how severe they were. The patient can then print off the summary and show her doctor.

Results are shown in colour-coded graphs that correspond to the severity of the symptoms under categories.

The printer-friendly graphs record the frequency of symptoms over a period of two weeks (recommended).

Bloating symptoms

- Abdominal bloating: Within a week. Severe 5, Moderate 4, Mild 2, None 0.
- Bigger than usual abdomen: Within a month. Severe 4, Moderate 3, Mild 2, None 0.
- Tight or hard abdomen: More than six months. Severe 5, Moderate 3, Mild 2, None 0.

Eating less symptoms

- Feeling full more quickly than usual: Within a week. Severe 5, Moderate 4, Mild 2, None 0.
- Reduced appetite: Within a month. Severe 5, Moderate 3, Mild 2, None 0.
- Heartburn: Within a month. Severe 5, Moderate 3, Mild 2, None 0.

The checker has been developed using technology from HealthUnlocked, a UK company, founded by clinicians, that provides tools to help patients and clinicians support, track and manage health problems online.

Mr Andy Nordin, Consultant Gynaecologist said: "We hope that the tool will help women and their doctors assess who may benefit from keeping their symptoms under surveillance, and those who need to take action. It prompts

women to accurately define, record and quantify their symptoms, which are generally common and only rarely caused by ovarian cancer. This should help doctors to more quickly identify women who need specialist assessment. Women who do not appear to be at significant risk on the basis of their symptoms will also find the tool helpful and reassuring.”

Louise Bayne, chief executive of Ovacome, says: “This is not a tool which diagnoses ovarian cancer; but it is a way of helping women and their doctors reach a diagnosis more quickly.

“We know from our latest survey of patients that women are good at going to see their GP – and the vast majority of women who experience these symptoms go to see their doctor within five weeks of first experiencing them. But once they are in the surgery, communicating symptoms like bloating is problematic and easily misunderstood. In our survey of 100 women undertaken last year, 40% of respondents received a diagnostic CA125 blood test or scan within one to three weeks of first visiting their GP, but for 41% it took longer than three months, and 16% had to wait a year or longer.

“Around 60% of women are not being diagnosed following the first or second visit to their GP, and they are being told that they have IBS, or middle-aged spread, that they need to change their lifestyle.

“Being women, once these patients have been given a task to perform, they are unlikely to revisit their GP for many more weeks – of course, the ones with ovarian cancer will have failed to resolve their symptoms by eating less or eating different types of food.

“We believe this tool can act as a safety net to help those women decide when another visit to the surgery is required and to communicate more effectively with their doctors.

“A typical GP will only see one case in every five years and most of these will be from women at the time of their menopause or later – it’s easy to understand why they want to dismiss other, less serious causes of symptoms such as IBS, bloating, weight gain before thinking the worst – particularly in a younger woman.

“However, this needs to change. Ovarian cancer needs to be investigated as an option early on. If it’s caught at the earliest stage, patients have a 90% survival rate beyond five years.”

-ENDS-

Editor’s Notes

Ovacome, the ovarian cancer support and information network, which has over 5,500 members, is working to support both women and health professionals to improve the diagnosis of the disease. The charity is leading the way in building a greater understanding of the disease’s symptoms with the launch of its BEAT campaign in March 2010. As part of this GP involved initiative, Ovacome has introduced an innovative web-based risk and symptoms toolkit for women who suspect that they may have the disease to mark Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month in March 2011.

Ovacome, which has its own nurse-led support service, has an unrivalled understanding of ovarian cancer and the clinical trial process, with access to the UK’s top clinicians.

It prides itself on being the authority on the disease and the one stop shop for journalists wanting the latest information and statistics on ovarian cancer, as well media-friendly case studies and photos.

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