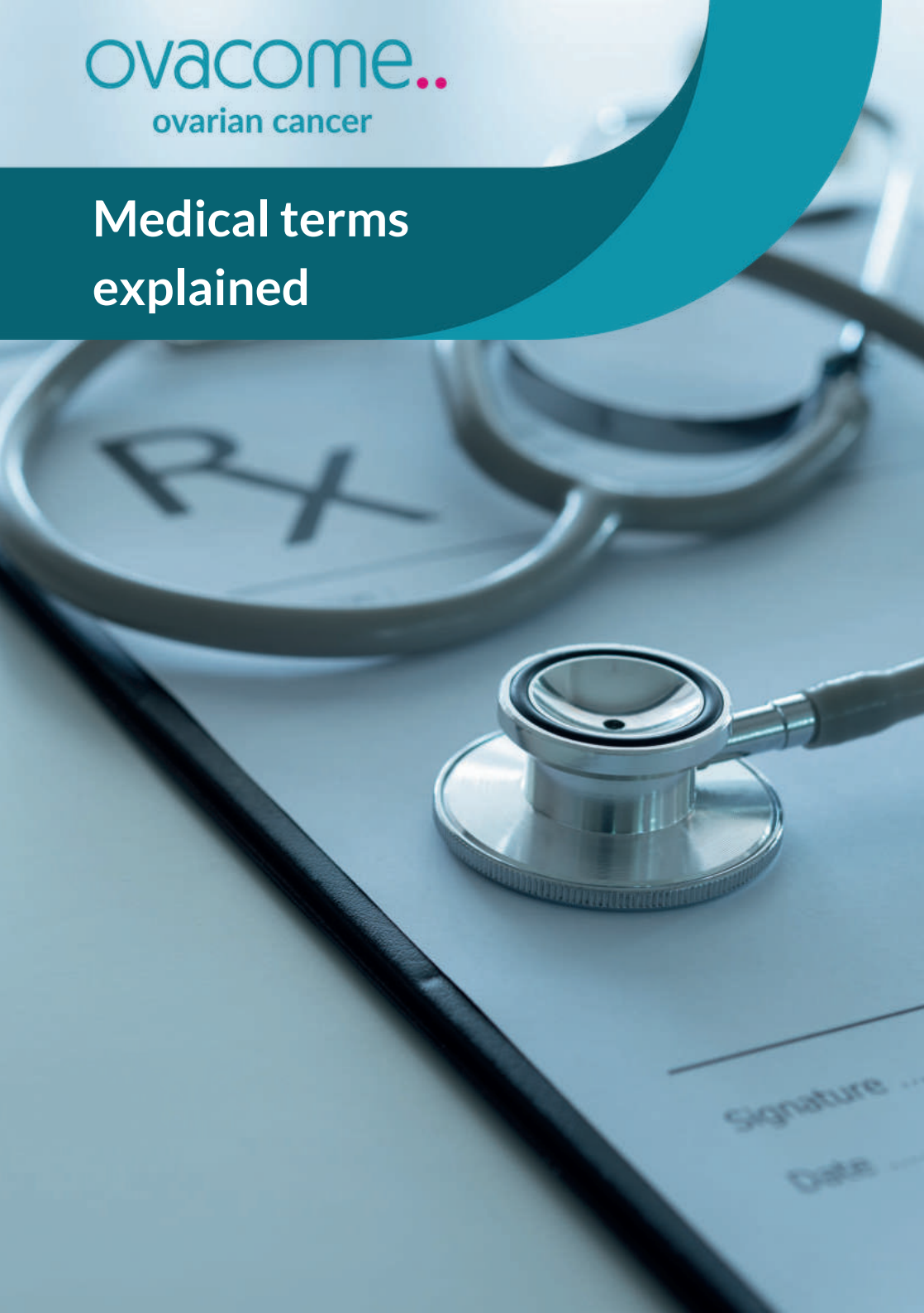


Medical terms explained



Ovacome is a national charity providing support and information to anyone affected by ovarian cancer.

We run a free telephone and email support line and work to raise awareness and give a voice to all those affected by ovarian cancer.

This booklet is part of a series giving clinical information about ovarian cancer.

It explains words and terminology that patients may hear and see during their ovarian cancer diagnosis, treatment, and care.



Medical and other terms explained

Below are explanations of some of the terms that you may have heard during appointments or in reading information about ovarian cancer. If there are any other terms that you would like us to explain, please call 0800 008 7054 or email support@ovacome.org.uk

Abdomen

Part of the body that includes the stomach, intestines and other digestive organs.

Acupuncture

A complementary therapy where the use of fine needles is believed to control the body's energy flow. This is sometimes used as NHS treatment for pain.

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 feelings by drawing and painting.

Ascites

Fluid that builds up in the abdomen, usually caused by cancer but occasionally due to 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 examination under a microscope in a laboratory.

Bone marrow

The spongy inner part of large bones where blood cells are made.

Borderline ovarian tumours

Sometimes known as tumours of low malignant potential (LMP), borderline tumours or borderline cysts. Borderline tumours are neither cancerous nor benign. They are growths which have some abnormal and cancer-like characteristics, but do not usually spread beyond the ovary.

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

Talking with a trained counsellor to make sense of feelings. This can offer new ideas for coping.

CT scan

A CT (computerised tomography) scan uses x-rays to produce multiple images of the body.

Cytology

Examining cells under a microscope.

Debulking

Surgery to remove as much of the cancer as possible if it has spread to other areas of the pelvis or abdomen. It is the surgical removal of the womb, ovaries, fallopian tubes, cervix and omentum. This is a total abdominal hysterectomy (TAH) and bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy.

Diagnosis

Finding the type of disease a person is suffering from.

Dietitian

A health professional who specialises in nutrition and gives people advice on how to eat well 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.

Debulking is surgery to remove as much of the cancer as possible if it has spread to other areas of the pelvis or abdomen.



Grade of tumour

A measurement of how quickly a tumour will grow. This is found by analysing the tumour under a microscope. Cancers are graded one to three, with three being the fastest growing.

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/Histopathology

The study of the structure of tissues using a microscope and special dyes. This process aids diagnosis by analysing samples from biopsies.

Hormones

Chemical substances produced by glands in the body which are carried in the blood and help control how the body works.

Hormonal therapy

Medicine that blocks or lowers the amount of hormone in the body to slow down or stop the cancer's growth.

Immune system

The body's main defence system, which fights infections or foreign substances.

Immunotherapy

A developing area of medicine looking at ways of using the body's own immune system to destroy cancer cells.

Inoperable

Refers to a cancer that cannot be removed by surgery because this might cause too much damage to normal tissue.

Interval surgery

A second operation performed after cycles of chemotherapy which is followed by more chemotherapy.

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 under general anaesthetic which involves making a small cut in the abdomen so that a tiny telescope (laparoscope) can be inserted to examine the abdomen. Sometimes referred to as keyhole surgery.

Laparotomy

An operation under general anaesthetic 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) around the body. Lymph contains water, protein, minerals and white blood cells. The lymph passes through a series of filters, 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.

Maintenance therapy

Treating cancer with drugs after an initial treatment, to prevent or delay it coming back.

Malignant

Malignant tumours are cancerous tumours able to spread to and invade surrounding tissues and other parts of 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 signals that are sent out from the water molecules in the body.

MDT

Multidisciplinary team – several members of different hospital departments who meet to discuss the treatment plan for individual patients.

Nadir point

The lowest point in reference to white blood cells, red blood cells and platelets. Usually occurs about 10 days after treatment, depending on the drugs given.

Nausea

Feeling sick.

NED

This stands for No Evidence of Disease. It means there is no physical evidence of the disease on examination or imaging tests after treatment. It means the same as complete remission or complete response. It does not mean the cancer is cured.

Neo-adjuvant

This describes chemotherapy that is given to reduce the cancer before primary surgery.

Omentum

A sheet of fat that lies over the intestines inside the abdomen.

Omentectomy

Surgical removal of the 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. Palliative care can help to treat symptoms even during curative treatment.

PARP inhibitor

A drug that acts on the cancer's DNA to stop it repairing itself.

Maintenance therapies treat cancer with drugs after an initial treatment, to prevent or delay it coming back.



Pathology

The branch of medicine that deals with examining parts of the body affected by disease.

Clinical pathology diagnoses diseases by analysing fluids such as blood and urine as well as biopsied tissue.

Peritoneum

The membrane lining the abdomen and covering abdominal organs.

PET scan

Positron Emission Tomography scans use an injection of a very small amount of radioactive tracer, usually glucose, to show the extent of the cancer, the effectiveness of treatment and distinguish between cancer and scar tissue.

Pleurix drain/Rocket drain

A soft tube inserted in the pleural cavity (the space between the pleural membranes which cover the lungs) to drain a build-up of fluid, sometimes called a pleural effusion. These drains are also used to drain ascites, the build-up of fluid in the abdomen. They can be left in place so that drainage happens at home rather than in hospital.

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-cath

Sometimes called an implantable or subcutaneous port. A soft plastic tube is put into a vein in the chest or arm and has an opening just under the skin. It allows 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

Disease 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 interprets x-rays, scans and other imaging to aid the diagnosis and management of disease. A treatment radiologist also performs scan-guided biopsies and the placement of stents and catheters.

Radiotherapist/therapeutic radiographer

The member of the health-care team who gives patients radiotherapy.

Reflexology

A complementary therapy where the therapist applies gentle pressure to specific acupressure 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 does not respond well to chemotherapy.

Secondaries

When a tumour has spread from its place of origin. (This is also called metastasis.)

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 drive or pump

A device to give medication under the skin continuously and avoid giving several injections.

Systemic anti-cancer therapy (SATC)

The use of drugs such as chemotherapy to treat cancer.

TAHBSO

Total abdominal hysterectomy and bilateral salpingo-oophorectomy. This is an operation when the uterus (womb) including the cervix, the fallopian tubes and the ovaries, are removed during a laparotomy (through an incision in the abdominal wall).

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.

Tissue

Cell structures that form the organs of the body.

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 measured in the blood. These can be used to help detect cancer, to see if treatment is being successful, or to see if disease comes back. The marker for ovarian cancer is CA125.

Ultrasound scan

Using sound waves to build a picture of organs in the body, through a probe 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.

Yoga

A system of breathing techniques and exercise to help relaxation and stress relief while increasing blood circulation and mobility.

We welcome your feedback on this booklet. Please email ovacome@ovacome.org.uk or call 0800 008 7054. If you would like to discuss anything about ovarian cancer, please phone our support line on 0800 008 7054 Monday to Friday between 10am and 5pm. You can also visit our website at www.ovacome.org.uk. This is one of a series of information booklets produced by Ovacome. You can see them here: ovacome.org.uk/information.

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Disclaimer

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