

ovacome..  
ovarian cancer

## Stage 4 ovarian cancer



**Ovacom 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 is for those who have been diagnosed with stage 4 ovarian cancer and want more information about their cancer and how it is treated.**



# Stage 4 ovarian cancer

The ovarian cancer stage means how far your cancer has spread at the time it is discovered.

## Cancer staging

At stage 4 the cancer has spread beyond the abdomen and pelvis.

The cancer may be staged by doctors during surgery, when they will aim to remove as much of it as possible. They will take samples of tissue, and the fluid used to wash out the abdomen. These samples are then examined under a microscope to show how far the cancer has spread.

Some people may have biopsies taken from various parts of the body to find out the stage of the cancer. This means taking tissue samples through the skin using a fine needle. Sometimes a CT scan, which builds up a picture of the body using layers of x-rays, is used to find out the stage.

The system of staging also applies to fallopian tube and peritoneal cancers.

## What is stage 4 ovarian cancer?

At this stage the cancer has spread away from the ovaries to more distant organs.

- Stage 4a is when ovarian cancer has spread to the sheets of tissue (called pleura) which line the lungs. This is usually diagnosed when the cancer cells cause fluid to build up between the two sheets of tissue. This is a pleural effusion.

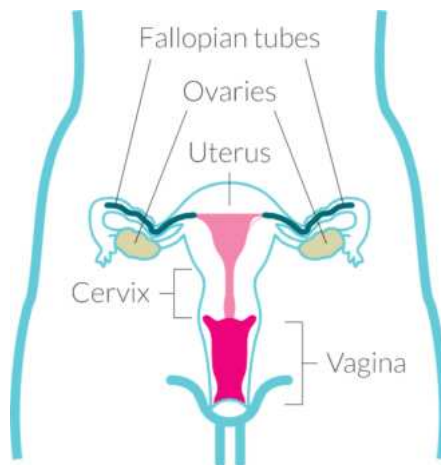
- Stage 4b is when the cancer has spread to organs or lymph nodes outside the abdomen. This can include the liver or spleen.

### Grading stage 4 ovarian cancer

Ovarian cancer is graded as well as staged, to show how active it is and how quickly or slowly it grows.

Stage 4 cancer may be graded if it is treated with surgery.

- Grade 1 (sometimes also called well differentiated cancer) means that under a microscope, the cells look similar to normal cells, so they are likely to grow normally.
- Grade 2 (moderately differentiated) cells look more abnormal and are expected to grow slightly faster.
- Grade 3 (poorly differentiated) cells look very different from normal cells and are expected to grow more quickly.



*A diagram of the female reproductive system*

## How is stage 4 ovarian cancer treated?

Treatment for this stage includes relieving symptoms caused by the cancer.

### Ascites

The tumour on the lining of the abdomen may produce fluid which collects inside the abdomen. This collection of fluid is called ascities.

If this happens and becomes uncomfortable then your team may try and reduce it using chemotherapy, or a simple procedure called ascitic drainage is carried out to drain off the fluid.

### Pleural effusion

If you have stage 4a you are likely to have a pleural effusion. This is when fluid collects in the layer of tissue that covers the lungs.

If this is making you breathless and uncomfortable your consultant will arrange for the fluid to be drained off in a simple procedure. This is called pleural drainage and involves numbing the area with local anaesthetic and inserting a drain to remove the excess fluid.

You may be offered a pleurodesis. This is when the fluid is drained and the space between the pleural membranes is blocked by inserting medical talc. This stops fluid collecting there and can prevent further pleural effusions. Less commonly you may be offered a pleurectomy. This is an operation under general anaesthetic to remove pleural tissue and seal the space where fluid has been collecting.

### Surgery

Some people can be treated for stage 4 ovarian cancer with abdominal surgery that aims to remove as much of the cancer as possible, followed by chemotherapy. You may be recommended to have chemotherapy to shrink the cancer before surgery, followed by another course after the operation.

Your surgeon will remove your ovaries, fallopian tubes, womb and abdominal lining. They will also aim to remove any cancer growing on other organs. Lymph nodes close to where the cancer has spread may also be removed. This surgery is called optimal cytoreduction or debulking surgery. You can see more information here : [www.ovacome.org.uk/surgery-for-ovarian-cancer-booklet](http://www.ovacome.org.uk/surgery-for-ovarian-cancer-booklet)

Occasionally the cancer will have affected the bowel, and it may be necessary to remove a section of the bowel and create a colostomy or ileostomy. This is where an opening is created in your abdomen so that waste from your bowel can be collected in a small bag. This can be temporary; specialist staff will help you to manage this process.

## Chemotherapy

Sometimes surgery is not possible, and chemotherapy alone is used to reduce the tumours and control the cancer's spread.

Chemotherapy is given as a course of six treatments every three weeks. It is likely that your consultant will recommend using two chemotherapy drugs called carboplatin and paclitaxel (Taxol). They may also recommend using a third drug called Avastin which is a targeted therapy (monoclonal antibody) and works by reducing the cancer's blood supply.

You can see more information here

<https://www.ovacome.org.uk/chemotherapy-booklet>

<https://www.ovacome.org.uk/targeted-therapies-booklet>

We welcome your feedback on this booklet. Please email [ovacome@ovacome.org.uk](mailto: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](http://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](http://ovacome.org.uk/information).

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### Disclaimer

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