

ovacome..

ovarian cancer

Signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer



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 describes the signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer and discussing these with your GP.

Support line: 0800 008 7054 or email:
support@ovacome.org.uk

Website: www.ovacome.org.uk

Email: ovacome@ovacome.org.uk



Signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer

Ovarian cancer is diagnosed in around 7,500 people each year in the UK. It occurs most often in those over 45 and after the menopause.

For most people there is no particular reason why they have developed ovarian cancer. However, some people have an increased risk of developing ovarian cancer due to a gene change which runs in the family.

Ovarian cancer can be hard to diagnose because the symptoms can be similar to more common and less serious conditions. It is sometimes mistaken for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) although IBS rarely occurs for the first time in those aged over 50.

A GP in an average size practice may see just one person with ovarian cancer every five years.

The most common symptoms of ovarian cancer are:

- Persistent bloating of the abdomen.
- Difficulty eating and feeling full quickly.
- Persistent abdominal and pelvic pain.
- Changes in urination or bowel habit.

Other symptoms can include:

- Tiredness or fatigue.
- Unusual vaginal bleeding or discharge.
- Unintentional weight loss or gain.

A photograph of a silver fork with a wooden handle and a white plate, set against a light blue background. The fork is positioned vertically on the left, and the plate is on the right, partially visible.

**Difficulty eating and feeling
full quickly can be a
symptom of ovarian cancer.**

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence has clinical guideline CG122 Ovarian cancer: recognition and initial management. GPs can refer to this.

The guideline says:

Carry out tests in primary care if a woman (especially if 50 or over) reports having any of the following symptoms on a persistent or frequent basis – particularly more than 12 times per month:

- persistent abdominal distension (women often refer to this as 'bloating')
- feeling full (early satiety) and/or loss of appetite
- pelvic or abdominal pain
- increased urinary urgency and/or frequency.

Your GP may arrange for a CA125 blood test and possibly an ultrasound. There are more details in our booklet Tests for ovarian cancer.

The Scottish Referral Guidelines for Suspected Cancer 2025 recommend an abdominal examination, CA125 blood test and ultrasound for:

Women (especially those aged 50 or over) with one or more of the following unexplained symptoms occurring most days over the last four weeks:

- abdominal distension or persistent bloating
- feeling full quickly, difficulty eating or loss of appetite
- pelvic or abdominal pain

- increased urinary urgency and/or frequency
- change in bowel habit

Women aged 50 or over who have experienced new symptoms within the last 12 months that suggest irritable bowel syndrome

You can use the Ovacome symptom diary at

www.ovacome.org.uk/symptom-diary to keep a record to show your doctor.

The Ovacome support team is here to talk through any worries and help you plan for conversations with your GP. You can contact us Monday-Friday 10am-5pm on 0800 008 7054 or email support@ovacome.org.uk

Further information:

www.ovacome.org.uk/tests-for-ovarian-cancer

www.ovacome.org.uk/ovarian-cancer-and-genetics

References

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence has clinical guideline CG122 Ovarian cancer: recognition and initial management: www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg122/chapter/Recommendations#detection-in-primary-care

Scottish Referral Guidelines for Suspected Cancer 2025:

www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-referral-guidelines-suspected-cancer-2025/pages/4/

You can download and use our **free symptom diary** to keep a record to show your doctor.

Symptom diary
Recognise the B.E.A.T. signs of ovarian cancer:

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B Bloating
that doesn't come and go

- Tummy feeling fuller / tighter
- Tummy feels or looks bigger than usual
- Tummy feels harder than usual
- Lumps or bumps you can feel in your tummy

E Eating difficulties
and feeling full more quickly

- Feeling full more quickly and/or having a reduced appetite
- Feeling or being sick
- Having trapped wind and/or burping more
- Having difficulty swallowing
- It feels like something is coming back up
- Indigestion
- Heartburn

A Abdominal pain
you feel first

- Uncomfortable pain in the tummy
- Pain in the tummy
- Pain in the tummy
- Pain in the tummy

T Toilet changes
in frequency or bowel habits

How to use this symptom diary

If you're experiencing any of these symptoms, use the diary on the next page to track their frequency using the tick boxes. There is space to add any notes or questions you may have.

If your symptoms aren't going away, book an appointment to see your doctor. Take this diary with you and ask them to refer to the NICE clinical guidelines CG122 Ovarian cancer: recognition and initial management.

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Symptoms	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
B Bloating that doesn't come and go	M T W TH F SA SU	M T W TH F SA SU	M T W TH F SA SU
E Eating difficulties and feeling full more quickly	M T W TH F SA SU	M T W TH F SA SU	M T W TH F SA SU
A Abdominal pain you feel first	M T W TH F SA SU	M T W TH F SA SU	M T W TH F SA SU
T Toilet changes in frequency or bowel habits	M T W TH F SA SU	M T W TH F SA SU	M T W TH F SA SU

Other notes

For example:

- Do you have any other symptoms?
- Do you have a family history of cancer in your immediate relatives?
- Do you have any questions that you want to ask your GP?

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: www.ovacome.org.uk/information.

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Disclaimer

Ovacome booklets provide information and support. We make every effort to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information at the time of publication. The information we give is not a substitute for professional medical care. If you suspect you have cancer, you should consult your doctor as quickly as possible. Ovacome cannot accept any liability for any inaccuracy in linked sources.

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Ovacome is a charity. We receive no government funding and most of our funding is provided by our community of supporters. We want to continue providing free support and information to people when they need it most. If you can, then please help us by making a donation. You can **scan the QR code to the right or visit www.ovacome.org.uk/donate.**



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