

ovacome..

ovarian cancer

The stages 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 how ovarian cancer is classified into four stages when diagnosed, and what treatment can be offered for each stage. There is a glossary to explain words you may not be familiar with.



The stages of ovarian cancer

The stage of ovarian cancer means how far the cancer has spread at the time it is diagnosed. This may be based on scans or after surgery when your surgeon has seen the cancer. Laboratory reports will confirm the stage and what type of ovarian cancer you have. The system of staging also applies to fallopian tube and primary peritoneal cancers.

Stage 1

This is the earliest stage and means that the cancer affects one or both of the ovaries, or one or both fallopian tubes. At this stage the cancer may cause few symptoms, and most people are not aware that anything is wrong.

About 20 per cent (20 in 100) of people have their cancer found at this early stage.

Even if a cancer appears to affect only the ovary, it is still possible that it has spread. To be certain that a cancer is at stage 1 samples from other areas of the body are taken during surgery and examined under the microscope.

If cancer is confirmed as stage 1, the outlook is good. This is particularly the case if the cancer is contained within one ovary, stage 1a, or both ovaries, stage 1b, when surgery alone may be enough to treat it.

Stage 1c is when the cancer is limited to one or both ovaries, or fallopian tubes.



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But at this stage cancer cells may have leaked into the abdomen during initial investigative surgery (stage 1c1); the ovary may have ruptured before surgery or there may be a tumour on the ovary or fallopian tube surface (stage 1c2); or there may be cancer cells present in abdominal fluids (stage 1c3). Stage 1c ovarian cancer usually requires chemotherapy.

Stage 2

This is when the cancer has spread outside the ovary into the pelvis or has gone into the uterus (womb). Primary peritoneal cancer is classified as stage 2.

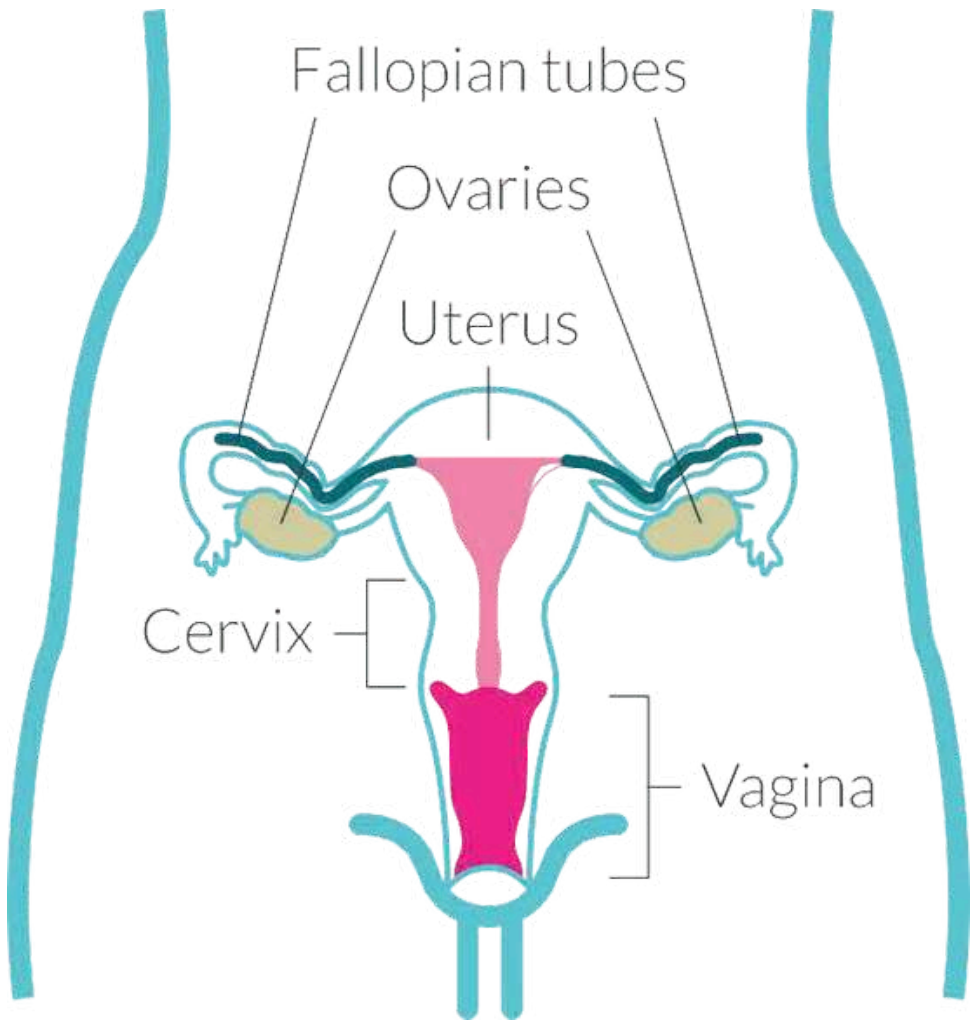
Ovarian cancer at stage 2 is only found in a small number of people with the disease. This is because the lining of the pelvis and abdomen are not separated, so the cancer usually spreads to the abdomen at the same time as the pelvis.

Ovarian cancer is classified as stage 2a when it has spread to the uterus (womb) or fallopian tubes. Stage 2b is when the tumour has spread into other pelvic tissues.

If you have stage 2 ovarian cancer you are likely to be offered chemotherapy as well as surgery.

Stage 3

This is the most common stage at which ovarian cancer is diagnosed. At this stage the cancer may have spread beyond the pelvis to the lymph nodes in the peritoneum (the lining of the abdominal cavity).



A diagram of the female reproductive system



The stage of ovarian cancer means how far the cancer has spread at the time it is diagnosed.

Stage 3a1 is when the cancer has spread only to the peritoneal lymph nodes, these are nodes in the abdominal area. Stage 3a1(i) means the disease in the lymph nodes measures up to 10 millimetres (mm) in diameter, 3a1(ii) means that cancer in the lymph nodes measures more than 10mm. Stage 3a2 is when microscopic disease has spread beyond the pelvis with or without affecting the peritoneal nodes.

Stage 3b means visible disease has spread beyond the pelvis and measures less than two centimetres (cms) with or without affecting the peritoneal nodes.

Stage 3c is visible disease beyond the pelvis measuring more than two cms with or without involving the peritoneal nodes, including the surface of the liver and the spleen but not within these organs.

At stage 3 the tumour on the lining of the abdomen (peritoneum) may cause fluid to collect inside the abdomen. This collection of fluid is called ascites.

Stage 4

Stage 4 ovarian cancer has spread beyond the abdomen to more distant organs.

Stage 4a is when the cancer causes a build-up of fluid between the lining of the lungs and the chest wall, called a pleural effusion. This can result in breathlessness. Tests show this fluid contains cancer cells.

Stage 4b is when the cancer has spread within other more distant organs including lymph nodes outside the abdominal cavity.

If you have stage 3 or stage 4 ovarian cancer you may be offered surgery and chemotherapy. You may be offered some chemotherapy before surgery and the rest of the course afterwards. For some people chemotherapy alone may be the best treatment.

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is a drug treatment which kills cancer cells. The commonest given for ovarian cancer is called carboplatin. It is given through a drip into a vein once every three weeks for six cycles. Paclitaxel (Taxol), another drug given into veins, may also be used in addition. For some rarer ovarian cancers other types of drugs are used as well.

You can see more information here:

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

See more information about stages in these Ovacome booklets:

<https://www.ovacome.org.uk/stage-1-booklet>

<https://www.ovacome.org.uk/stage-2-booklet>

<https://www.ovacome.org.uk/stage-3-booklet>

<https://www.ovacome.org.uk/stage-4-booklet>



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Glossary

Ascites

Fluid caused by cancer that collects in the abdomen.

Chemotherapy

Treating cancer using cytotoxic drugs that kill cancer cells.

Gynaecology

The study of the female reproductive system.

Lymph nodes / glands

Small pearl-like glands connected to the lymph system which act as filters to bacteria or cancer cells.

Lymph system

The tubes and lymph nodes that carry tissue fluid (lymph) around the body.

Peritoneum

The lining of the abdominal cavity.

Pleural effusion

Fluid that collects between the lining of the lung (pleura) and the chest wall.

We welcome your feedback on this booklet, email ovacome@ovacome.org.uk or call us on 0800 008 7054. Calls are free. If you would like to discuss anything about ovarian cancer, please phone our free support line on 0800 008 7054 Monday to Friday between 10am and 5pm. You can also visit our website at www.ovacome.org.uk

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Disclaimer

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