

# Ovarian Cancer

**3100** Canadian women developed ovarian cancer in 2023.<sup>1</sup>

**45%** of Canadian women diagnosed with ovarian cancer will survive at least 5 years.<sup>1</sup>

## What is ovarian cancer?

Ovarian cancer occurs when the cells that make up the ovaries undergo a malignant change.

Women are born with two ovaries, sitting on either side of the uterus, or womb. The ovaries are round walnut-sized structures that play a vital role in the storage, development and release of an egg during each menstrual cycle. The ovaries also contribute to the production of female reproductive hormones, estrogen and progesterone, in the body.

There are many different types of ovarian cancers, all named for the tissue in which they originate. Epithelial ovarian carcinoma, originating in the outer or 'epithelial' layer of the ovary is the most common type of ovarian cancer. The ovary is also prone to many different types of non-cancerous tumours, such as cysts.

## Symptoms

Ovarian cancer is almost always asymptomatic in the early stages. By the time most women notice symptoms, the cancer has often already started to spread. If symptoms do arise, they are usually vague and easily dismissed.

- Pain or discomfort in the pelvic area
- Fatigue
- Changes in bowel habits ie: diarrhea or constipation
- Abdominal bloating or swelling
- Feeling full after eating
- Weight loss

If you are a post-menopausal woman experiencing symptoms consistent with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) for the first time, book an appointment with a care provider for further testing.

## Risk Factors

- Family history of ovarian cancer
- Personal history of breast cancer
- Endometriosis
- HRT use
- BRCA gene mutations
- Oral 'birth control' pill use
- Smoking
- Obesity

## What is BRCA?

BRCA genes are normally found in the body and are believed to play a role in controlling the growth of cancer cells. These genes are passed down by one or both of your parents. When the BRCA gene has a mutation or 'change' in its structure, it no longer controls cancer growth, putting you at higher risk of developing breast and ovarian cancer. These mutations are rare, occurring in about 1 in 500 people. Women with inherited BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene mutations have up to a 60% chance of developing ovarian cancer in their lifetime.<sup>2</sup>

## Diagnosis

If your doctor suspects a diagnosis of ovarian cancer based on your history and exam, they will need to order a few more tests to confirm the diagnosis. Initial testing often includes a transvaginal ultrasound to visualize the ovaries and an ovarian cancer blood test called CA-125.

Even if both tests are abnormal, your doctor will most likely refer you for a CT-scan before confidently making a diagnosis. Further testing will likely be carried out to confirm tumour size and stage to help direct treatment.

**About 60% of women with ovarian cancer have metastatic disease at the time of diagnosis.<sup>3</sup>**

## How can Teladoc Health help?

If you have been diagnosed with ovarian cancer and would like a second opinion on treatment options, our Expert Medical Opinion service can locate a specialist to review your case.

Our Mental Health Navigator services can help you find mental health resources in your community to support you through your cancer journey. Mental Health Navigator assessments can also support individuals who are looking to address any secondary mental health symptoms alongside their cancer journey.

This guide is not meant to provide medical advice or service and should not be construed as the professional advice of Teladoc Health. As such, Teladoc Health does not guarantee or assume responsibility for the correctness of the information or its applicability regarding any specific factual situation. Personal health problems should be brought to the attention of physicians and appropriate health care professionals.

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1. "Canadian Cancer Statistics 2023." Canadian Cancer Society, Government of Canada, [cdn.cancer.ca/-/media/files/research/cancer-statistics/2021-statistics/2021-pdf-en-final.pdf](https://cdn.cancer.ca/-/media/files/research/cancer-statistics/2021-statistics/2021-pdf-en-final.pdf). Accessed 5 Jan. 2024.

2. Cecere, Sabrina Chiara, and Sandro Pignata. "BRCA1 and BRCA2 in Ovarian Cancer." OncologyPRO, European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO), 24 July 2016, [oncologypro.esmo.org/education-library/factsheets-on-biomarkers/brca1-and-brca2-in-ovarian-cancer#eztoc\\_4\\_1\\_1\\_1](https://oncologypro.esmo.org/education-library/factsheets-on-biomarkers/brca1-and-brca2-in-ovarian-cancer#eztoc_4_1_1_1).

3. Canadian Cancer Society. "Ovarian Cancer." Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Cancer Society, [cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-types/ovarian](https://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-types/ovarian). Accessed 5 Jan. 2024.

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About Teladoc Health: Teladoc Health is empowering all people everywhere to live healthier lives by transforming the healthcare experience. Recognized as the world leader in whole-person virtual care, Teladoc Health leverages clinical expertise, advanced technology and actionable data insights to meet the evolving needs of consumers and healthcare professionals.

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