

Ovarian Cancer –

Let's get the conversation started



Did you know that ovarian cancer ranks fifth in cancer deaths amongst women, accounting for more deaths than any other cancer of the female reproductive system? Or that early symptoms tend to be vague and non-specific and are common to many other, less serious conditions?

Early detection is key to survival and there is often a lack of awareness of the symptoms associated with ovarian cancer. As in the case of other gynaecological cancers, signs and symptoms are not well known, are stigmatized, and not sufficiently talked about.

Possible symptoms

The four most common symptoms of ovarian cancer are:

- Bloating that is persistent and does not come or go
- Difficulty eating and feeling full more quickly
- Pelvic or abdominal pain that is experienced most days
- Increased urinary urgency and/or frequency.

Other symptoms might include unexplained weight change, abnormal vaginal bleeding, constant fatigue, breathlessness, changes in bowel habits such as constipation or diarrhoea.

The exact cause of ovarian cancer is not known, but the following factors may increase the risk: age over 50, a family history of ovarian or breast cancer, endometriosis, being overweight, lack of exercise, smoking.

Why is it important to talk about ovarian cancer?

- The lifetime risk of women being diagnosed with ovarian cancer is about 1 in 52
- In the UK, there are around 7,400 new cases every year or 20 cases diagnosed every day
- 80% of ovarian cancer cases occur in women over the age of 50
- The peak rate of cases is in women aged 75-79
- Ovarian cancer rates are higher among Caucasians than any other racial groups
- Lesbian women, bisexual women, and transgender men who retain their ovaries have an increased risk of developing ovarian cancer. Studies suggest that this is because these groups of people access less routine health checks than those who are heterosexual and cisgender (those whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth) due to fear of discrimination or negative experience with healthcare providers
- Taking contraceptive pills, pregnancy and breastfeeding decreases a person's risk of developing ovarian cancer; lesbian women and transgender men are less likely to use contraceptive pills or have biological children
- Non-binary and intersex people with ovaries are also at risk of ovarian cancer

Available support

The National Association of Women Pharmacists (NAWP) and the PDA want to play their part in raising awareness of ovarian cancer in the workplace.

Everyone living with or beyond cancer is protected under the Equality Act 2010 against unfair treatment in the workplace, both now and in the future.

Employers need to acknowledge that employees diagnosed with ovarian cancer might require time off for treatment and medical appointments as well as allowing flexibility with working hours, the tasks that need to be performed, and the working environment.

If employees cannot work because of their illness, they may be entitled to statutory or company sick pay and should speak to their employers.