

What is Ovarian Cancer?

- The ovaries are organs in the female reproductive system that produce ova (also known as eggs)
- Ova are released from the ovaries into the fallopian tubes, where they can then be fertilized by sperm
- The ovaries also secrete hormones that are important for reproductive health, including estrogen and progesterone
- 3000 Canadians were estimated to be diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2021, with 1950 deaths. On average, about 1 in 100 people with ovaries will develop ovarian cancer.

What causes Ovarian Cancer?

- While there are many risk factors for developing ovarian cancer, it can also develop in people without any risks
- The incidence of certain types of ovarian cancer increases with age, with incidence being higher in postmenopausal women
- Some genetic conditions, such a mutation in the BRCA genes, can also predispose you to ovarian cancer
 - Other risk factors include a family history of ovarian cancer, personal history of breast cancer, hormone replacement therapy, endometriosis, and smoking tobacco. Birth control pills, tubal ligation, and pregnancy can lower the risk of developing ovarian cancer

What are the symptoms of Ovarian Cancer?

- Like other gynecological cancers, ovarian cancer may not cause any symptoms in its early stages
- Symptoms are more common once the tumour has grown
- Symptoms can include abnormal vaginal bleeding, frequent vaginal discharge, a lump that can be felt in the pelvis or abdomen, bladder problems, constipation, changes to digestion, fatigue, pain during sex, and weight loss.

How is Ovarian Cancer diagnosed?

- During a pelvic examination, a doctor may detect a lump in the ovary
- Lumps may also be observed during an ultrasound
 - However, most lumps will not be cancerous
- If ovarian cancer is suspected, your doctor may order a blood test for CA-125 (cancer antigen 125). Excess levels of CA-125 may be a sign of ovarian cancer, but can be caused by other conditions. The most accurate method for diagnosing ovarian cancer is surgical biopsy, where tissue is removed and sent to a lab for analysis.

How is Ovarian Cancer treated?

- Treatment for ovarian cancer depends on specific information about your cancer, as well as your health
- Surgery is usually the first treatment and can involve removal of the ovary, fallopian tube(s), and/or the uterus
- Chemotherapy and hormonal therapy may also be used to treat ovarian cancer.

References:

- Canadian Cancer Society. Ovarian cancer. [Cited 2022 Feb 2]. Available from: <https://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-types/ovarian>
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