

After a diagnosis of ovarian cancer



After finding out you have ovarian cancer, you may feel shocked, upset, anxious or confused. These are normal responses. It may be helpful to talk about your treatment options with your doctor, family and friends. Seek as much information as you feel you need. It is up to you how involved you want to be in making decisions about your treatment.

Ovarian cancer is the ninth most common cancer in Australian women, with more than 1200 women diagnosed each year. It is not known why some women get ovarian cancer and others don't. Diagnosing ovarian cancer can be difficult as symptoms are often vague and like many other common illnesses.

How is ovarian cancer treated?

You may have a number of different health care professionals involved in your treatment and care. The type of treatment you have will depend on the stage of the cancer and your general health. Although nearly all treatments have side-effects, most can be effectively managed. Ask your doctor to explain what side-effects to expect and how best to manage them.

Surgery is usually the first treatment for ovarian cancer. The goal of surgery is to confirm the diagnosis, establish where the cancer has spread in early cases and remove as much of the tumour as possible in advanced cases. This allows other treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation therapy to be more effective.

Chemotherapy uses a combination of drugs to help attack cancer cells and slow or stop their growth. Most women will be offered chemotherapy as part of their treatment, as it reduces the risk of the cancer returning.

Chemotherapy for ovarian cancer is usually given through a drip into a vein in your arm. Your gynaecological oncologist or medical oncologist will explain which chemotherapy drugs are recommended for your cancer. Their side-effects, how long you may need to take the chemotherapy drugs and where you can have chemotherapy will also be explained to you.

Radiation therapy uses x-rays to destroy cancer cells. Only a minority of women with ovarian cancer will have radiation therapy. Your treatment team will discuss whether radiation therapy is recommended for you. Radiation therapy can also be used to reduce the size of the cancer, relieve pain, discomfort or other symptoms.

Diet therapy, or eating a healthy diet including a variety of foods, will ensure you have what your body needs to cope

with treatment and recovery. Be sure to discuss your diet with your dietician and doctor.

Exercise therapy can improve your cancer recovery. Research has shown that regular physical activity is beneficial and can reduce side-effects such as fatigue. Talk to your physiotherapist or exercise physiologist and doctor.

What about my physical and emotional wellness?

- Don't be afraid to ask for professional and emotional support.
- Consider joining a cancer support group.
- Learn to ignore unwanted advice and 'horror stories'.
- Live day-to-day and remember that every day is likely to be different.

Complementary therapies can work alongside medical treatments and some have been shown to improve quality of life or reduce pain. There is no evidence that these therapies can cure or prevent cancer. It is important to remember that some of these therapies have not been tested for side-effects, may work against other medical treatments and may be expensive. Let your doctor know about all complementary therapies you are thinking of using.

Remember, if you have any concerns or questions, please contact your doctor.

Where can I get reliable information?

Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20

Information and support for you and your family for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia.

Cancer Council Australia website

(with links to state and territory Cancer Councils)
www.cancer.org.au

National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre

www.nbocc.org.au

National Ovarian Cancer Network

1300 660 334

www.ovca.org

Gynaecological Cancer Society

1800 700 288

www.gcsau.org

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