

Diagnosing Ovarian Cancer

A Quick Guide

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This is a brief summary of 'Diagnosing ovarian cancer' from our website. You will find more detailed information on there. In this information there are sections on

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You can view this information in a larger print on our website.

Ovarian cancer tests

You will usually see your family doctor first, who will ask you about your general health and examine you. Your GP will ask about any symptoms you have had. They may take a blood sample to send away for testing. They may want to examine you internally to see if your womb and ovaries feel abnormal in any way. If there is any cause for concern, your GP may arrange for you to have an ultrasound. They may then refer you to a gynaecologist at your local hospital.

At the hospital

The specialist will ask you about your medical history and symptoms. They will then examine you. You may have another internal examination. If your specialist is concerned that you may have ovarian cancer, they will arrange some tests. You are likely to have a blood test for CA125 and an ultrasound first of all, if you have not already had them. You may also have a CT scan.

While you are waiting for results, it may help to talk to a close friend or relative about how you are feeling. Or you may want to contact a cancer support group to talk to someone who has been through similar experiences.

Further tests for ovarian cancer

It may not be possible to diagnose ovarian cancer until after you have had an operation. If your earlier tests suggest you have ovarian cancer, your specialist may ask you to have further tests before surgery. These are to see how far the cancer has grown, and whether it has spread. The results will help your doctor decide on the best possible treatment for you.

If you have a swollen abdomen from a build up of fluid, your doctor may take a sample of the fluid to check for cancer cells. After a local anaesthetic to numb your skin, the doctor puts a thin needle in to draw off some fluid. This goes to the laboratory for examination under a microscope.

Your doctor may suggest taking tissue samples (biopsies) from your ovaries or the sheet of fatty tissue inside your abdomen (the omentum). Your doctor will use a CT scan or ultrasound to help guide the needle through the skin to take the sample. This is called an image guided biopsy. You will have a local anaesthetic. You may have samples taken from different places, so you may have several needle puncture sites. You often have this test done as an outpatient.

If you are unable to have an image guided biopsy, your doctor may want to look inside your abdomen using a camera on a tube instead. This is called a laparoscopy. It allows the doctor to examine your ovaries and the surrounding area. You have a short general anaesthetic. The doctor passes the tube through a small cut in your abdomen, looks for any signs of cancer and takes tissue samples if necessary.

If there is a high chance that you have ovarian cancer, or you are unable to have a laparoscopy, you may have an operation called a laparotomy. The surgeon makes a large cut into your abdomen so that they can examine the inside of your abdomen and pelvis. They take samples to check for cancer. These may be looked at by a pathologist during your operation. If cancer cells are found, the surgeon may continue to remove as much of the cancer as possible. They will only do this part of the operation if you agreed to it before surgery.

If you feel anxious waiting for test results, it may help to talk to your clinical nurse specialist, or a close friend or relative about how you are feeling. Or you may want to contact a cancer support group to talk to someone who has been through a similar experience.

Questions for your doctor about diagnosing ovarian cancer

- What tests are you going to do?
- What are you looking for?
- Will the tests show whether I have cancer?
- Will you know what treatment I need when you have the results?
- Are any of the tests painful?
- Do any of the tests have after effects?
- Can I have my tests as an out patient?
- Can I bring someone with me when I have the tests?
- How long will the results take?
- Who will give me the test results?

Notes

For more information, visit our website <http://www.cruk.org/cancerhelp>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. Our information is based on the best current scientific evidence and reviewed regularly by leading clinicians and experts in health and social care.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on 0808 800 4040 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday.

Adapted from Cancer Research UK's Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in February 2014. CancerHelp UK is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through CancerHelp UK and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. Copyright Cancer Research UK 2014. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666) and in the Isle of Man (1103)