

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

An archive of past wellness articles is available at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/9966.asp>

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What to Know About Ovarian Cancer

September is Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month. Ovarian cancer is the tenth most common cancer among women and people with ovaries in Alberta. It is important to be able to recognize the symptoms and to learn about lowering your risk.

Epithelial ovarian cancer is the most common type of ovarian cancer and occurs most often in post-menopausal women and people with ovaries.

This kind of cancer occurs when abnormal cells grow inside or near your ovaries, the two small glands located on either side of the uterus. The role of your ovaries is to store and release eggs (ova), and to produce female sex hormones.

Symptoms of ovarian cancer can include:

- Recent frequent bloating.
- Pain in the belly or pelvis.
- Feeling full quickly or having trouble eating.
- The need to urinate more often than usual or an urgent need to urinate.

If any of these symptoms are new and occur for two to three days, consider booking an appointment with your family healthcare provider.

Factors that can increase your risk

- Inheriting gene changes such as a BRCA gene change.
- Family history of ovarian cancer. Having more than one relative with ovarian cancer further increases your risk.
- Having never given birth or being unable to get pregnant.
- Having started menstrual cycles before age 12 and experiencing menopause past age 50.

How to lower your risk

About 21 per cent of ovarian cancer cases in Alberta are preventable. To reduce your risk:

- Be active.
- Avoid or stop smoking.
- Eat a healthy and balanced diet.
- Maintain a healthy weight.

Screening for ovarian cancer

Screening tests are used to detect health issues before symptoms appear. If a doctor suspects ovarian cancer, they will likely refer a patient for diagnostic testing. They may recommend a test called CA-125, which measures the amount of cancer antigen 125 present in the blood.

Too much cancer antigen 125 in the blood can be a sign of ovarian cancer, but high levels can also be caused by other factors such as the menstrual cycle, endometriosis, and uterine fibroids.

Talk to a healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns about ovarian cancer or if you have symptoms.

Visit myhealth.alberta.ca to learn more about ovarian cancer.