Ovarian cancer, cancer of the ovaries, is often called a silent killer because it has no symptoms in the early stages, and signs like bloating can be easy to dismiss. Rates of ovarian cancer are dropping in the U.S., but it is still one of the most common cancers in women.

Women in the U.S. will get ovarian cancer in their lifetimes.

There are more than 30 subtypes of ovarian cancer. The 3 main types are:

- Epithelial ovarian carcinomas (85%-90% of cases): Most common, often diagnosed in advanced stages. Affects the outer surface of the ovary.
- Germ cell tumors (2%): Usually affects women in their teens or 20s. Starts inside the ova (eggs).
- Stromal cell tumors (1%): The rarest form, often found in the early stages. Develops in the tissues around the ovaries.

Ovarian cancer stages

- Stage 1: Earliest disease, tumor hasn’t spread
- Stage 2: Cancer has spread to nearby organs, like the uterus
- Stage 3: Cancer has spread beyond nearby organs to the lymph nodes or the lining of the abdomen
- Stage 4 (metastatic ovarian cancer): Cancer has moved to the lungs, liver and/or other distant organs

Ovarian cancer symptoms

Early stage ovarian cancer often has no symptoms. Once there are symptoms, the disease has often spread. This is why early detection is so important.

- Abdominal pain and bloating
- Pelvic/lower back pain
- Feeling full quickly/difficulty eating
- Urgent and frequent urination
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Fatigue/low energy levels
- Nausea/vomiting
- Weight loss
- Heavy or irregular vaginal bleeding/discharge
- Blood loss

Diagnosing Ovarian cancer

- Pelvic Exam: A pelvic exam can check for any changes to the shape or size of your ovaries
- Imaging: Ultrasounds, CT scans and MRIs look inside your body to see if there’s a mass and how likely it is to be cancer. Many ovarian masses are benign and not harmful.
- Blood Tests: CA-125 is a tumor marker blood test, which means that having high levels of CA-125 in your blood may be a sign you have cancer.
- Genetic Testing: If you’ve been diagnosed with ovarian cancer, your healthcare provider (HCP) may recommend getting genetic counseling and genetic testing for certain inherited gene changes, even if you do not have a family history of cancer.

Listening to your body is the first step to taking care of your health. If you have concerns or symptoms — especially if you have a family history of ovarian cancer — speak with your HCP.

What You Need to Know About Ovarian Cancer

Ovarian cancer is a silent killer. Here’s what you need to know about ovarian cancer and how it’s diagnosed.

Anyone with ovaries can develop ovarian cancer, but some groups have higher risk:

- Women 55 years or older
- Women with a family history of ovarian cancer
- Women with a family history of breast cancer

Cathartic ovarian carcinoma (80%-90% of cases): Most common, often diagnosed in advanced stages. Affects the outer surface of the ovary.

Germ cell tumors (2%): Usually affects women in their teens or 20s. Starts inside the ova (eggs).

Stromal cell tumors (1%): The rarest form, often found in the early stages. Develops in the tissues around the ovaries.

If you have concerns or symptoms — especially if you have a family history of ovarian cancer — speak with your HCP.