



CT WOMEN OF HOPE

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Ovarian Cancer Risk Factors



Genetics

Every woman is at risk for ovarian cancer. You and your doctor or gynecologist can discuss your family factors and reduce the risk that may fall in your genetic code. Over 20 percent of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer inherited the genetic mutation found in one of two genes, BRCA1, which is breast cancer gene 1 or BRCA2, which is breast cancer gene 2. These genes have a connection to both breast cancer and ovarian cancer; because of this, women who have already had breast cancer are at higher risk of getting ovarian cancer.

If your family history includes breast cancer, ovarian cancer, colon cancer, uterine cancer, or rectal cancer, this can indicate an increased risk for ovarian cancer. If you have a mother, daughter, or sister with ovarian cancer, there is a five percent risk of you getting ovarian cancer in your lifetime. A woman with a grandmother, mother, daughter or sister who has been diagnosed with ovarian cancer yet has no known genetic mutation, will still have an increased risk of developing ovarian cancer herself. The average woman has a 1.4 % risk of developing the disease in her lifetime.

A genetic connection to ovarian cancer called HNPCC or Lynch Syndrome (hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer) not only poses the greatest risk of colorectal cancer, but also increases the risk of ovarian cancer by almost 15% in a woman's lifetime. HNPCC also increase the risk of developing uterine cancer by more than 40%.

Medical History

Every woman is at risk for ovarian cancer. Women who have family history or have had their own personal history of cancer such as breast cancer, colon cancer, uterine cancer, or rectal cancer, have an increased risk for ovarian cancer. Endometriosis also increases the risk of endometrioid ovarian cancer and clear cell ovarian cancer.

Getting Older

Every woman is at risk for ovarian cancer, no matter what age they are. Although studies have shown ovarian cancer rates to be higher for women ages 55-64 years of age. Half of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer are under 63 years of age.

Infertility, Menstrual Cycle, Hormones and General Health

Studies have suggested that a woman is at an increased risk for developing ovarian cancer if she started her period before age 12, has not given birth to any children, gave birth to her first child after the age of 30, experienced menopause after 50, if she has never taken oral contraceptives, or if she has infertility, (even if she uses fertility drugs; this also increases the risk of ovarian cancer).

Women are at an increased risk for ovarian cancer if they use menopausal hormone therapy. While doctors prescribe this therapy to alleviate hot flashes, sleeplessness, night sweats and other symptoms of menopause, studies have shown that the combination of estrogen and progestin for more than five years for a woman who has not had a hysterectomy to have a significantly increased risk of ovarian cancer. Women with a hysterectomy and receiving estrogen therapy for ten years or more also increase the risk of ovarian cancer.

In 2009, a study found that nearly 80% higher risk group of women in the age bracket of 50 to 71 who had not taken hormones after menopause were found to be obese. This risk group was found to have a link between obesity and ovarian cancer.

How Can I Reduce My Risk?

Every woman is at risk for ovarian cancer. You and your doctor or gynecologist can discuss your family factors and reduce the risk that may fall in your genetic code.

Birth Control Pills

By using birth control pills (oral contraceptives), women have been able to decrease the risk of developing ovarian cancer. When taken for five years or more, a woman can have 50% lower risk than that of a woman who has never taken birth control pills at all.

Prophylactic Bilateral Salpingo Oophorectomy

In simple terms, a woman can significantly reduce her risk of ovarian cancer by removing her ovaries and fallopian tubes. This procedure does have risks like any other procedure; be sure to speak with your doctor or gynecologist to see if this is right for you. A more recent study found that women with BRCA1 mutations find the most benefit by removing their ovaries before age 35. There is another cancer that is very similar to ovarian cancer that can still occur, but it is very rare. It is called Primary peritoneal cancer.

Hysterectomy and Tubal Ligation

To reduce the risk of ovarian cancer by 33%, a woman may have a hysterectomy, removing the uterus, leaving the ovaries. Tying the fallopian tubes (tubal ligation), may be able to reduce the risk by more than 65% according to the American Cancer Society.