Symptoms

Most women diagnosed with ovarian cancer report symptoms. Symptoms of ovarian cancer are often vague and generalised and not gynaecological in nature.

Types of symptoms reported by women diagnosed with ovarian cancer

- Abdominal bloating
- Increased abdominal girth
- Indigestion
- Lack of appetite
- Feeling full after only a small amount of food
- Weight gain or weight loss
- Change in bowel habits
- Fatigue
- Urinary frequency or incontinence
- Abdominal and/or pelvic pain
- Feeling of pressure in the abdomen

Frequency of reporting of symptom categories

- Abdominal symptoms 77%
- Gastro-intestinal 70%
- Constitutional (eg fatigue) 50%
- Urinary 34%
- Pelvic 26%

Assessment of symptoms

If vague abdominal symptoms persist for more than one month consider ovarian cancer and undertake further assessment.

CA125

CA125 alone should not be used to either rule in or rule out ovarian cancer. While a very high value may assist in confirming the diagnosis, a low value is not helpful because of the non-specific nature of the test.

Factors that may elevate CA125

Gynaecological

- Ovarian cancer
- Acute PID
- Uterine fibroids
- Uterine adenomyosis
- Benign ovarian neoplasms
- Endometriosis
- Functional ovarian cysts
- Meig's syndrome
- Ovarian hyperstimulation
- Menstruation

Non-gynaecological

- Active hepatitis
- Acute pancreatitis

- Chronic disease of the liver
- Cirrhosis of the liver
- Congestive heart failure
- Diverticulitis
- Non-malignant ascites
- Pericarditis
- Pneumonia
- Polyarteritis nodosa
- Systemic lupus erythematosus
- Renal disease

Other malignant conditions

- Any disseminated intra-abdominal cancer
- Any gastrointestinal cancer
- Breast cancer, especially metastatic
- Mesothelioma

** A transvaginal ultrasound has a greater sensitivity for the detection of ovarian masses than transabdominal studies.
Assessment of women with vague and persistent abdominal symptoms

**Checklist for assessing symptoms**

**Patient history**
- Age (higher risk = 45 years or more)
- Parity (higher risk = nulliparous)
- Menopausal status (higher risk = postmenopausal)
- Family history, including breast, ovarian and bowel cancer
- Any recent tests and results

**Types of symptoms**
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**History of presenting symptoms**
- Type of symptom
- Site
- Nature of symptoms (persistent/recurring)
- When first noticed
- Duration
- Actions that relieve symptoms

**Findings to note**
- Firm resistance on abdominal palpation
- Unexpected fullness
- Fullness with shifting dullness on percussion
- Hard, irregular mass in the Pouch of Douglas
- Adnexal masses