



TARGET
OVARIAN
CANCER

General practice
nurse guide to
ovarian cancer

What you need to know

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Ovarian cancer symptoms

Guidance issued by NICE and SIGN recognises the following symptoms most commonly associated with ovarian cancer.



Persistent abdominal distension (bloating)



Early satiety and/or loss of appetite



Pelvic or abdominal pain



Urinary urgency and/or frequency

Other symptoms can include unexplained weight loss, fatigue, and changes in bowel habit.

Diagnosing ovarian cancer in primary care

Women should be referred urgently to gynae-oncology if physical examination identifies ascites and/or a pelvic or abdominal mass.

NICE recommends measuring serum CA125 in women reporting any symptom or combination of symptoms occurring 12 times a month or more, particularly if they are age 50 or over. Scottish SIGN guidance advises measuring CA125 and ordering urgent pelvic ultrasound concurrently.

"I am often the first point of contact for women visiting general practice. As nurses we are ideally placed to talk to women about ovarian cancer symptoms and encourage them to seek advice from their GP or ANP."

*Jenny Aston FRCGP (Hon),
Advanced Nurse Practitioner,
Queens Nurse and
RCGP ANP Champion*

Risk factors

Be particularly vigilant of symptoms in women over 50 years of age and women with a family history (maternal and paternal) of ovarian and breast cancer.

"Consider ovarian cancer in women with symptoms suggesting new onset IBS and recurring UTIs, especially if the woman is 50 or over. IBS rarely presents for the first time in women this age."

How you can help



Explain that cervical screening checks only for cervical cancer, not other cancers such as ovarian.

Consider talking to women about the symptoms of ovarian cancer during health checks.

- Encourage women reporting symptoms to speak to their GP or ANP about ovarian cancer. Suggest they complete an ovarian cancer symptoms diary ahead of the appointment.
- Talk to women about ovarian cancer symptoms during cervical sampling, health checks, contraception reviews, and menopause consultations. Offer women a symptoms leaflet to take away.

How Target Ovarian Cancer can help

- Access our RCN accredited online learning module on ovarian cancer at targetovariancancer.org.uk/rcgp
- Our free primary care toolkit contains essential information and resources including: 10 top tips, symptoms diary, and diagnostic tests fact sheet. Order free at targetovariancancer.org.uk/toolkit
- Women worried about symptoms, diagnosis or treatment can contact our nurse-led Support Line on **020 7923 5475** or ask a question at targetovariancancer.org.uk/supportline







"My stomach felt bloated and my appetite seemed to be unusually small.

"Over the next two months, I went to see my doctor a few times and they suggested that I was suffering from either IBS or diverticulitis.

"I'm convinced that my diagnosis would have been quicker if the doctors and nurses in my practice were more aware of ovarian cancer symptoms."

Mary, Devon



-  020 7923 5470
-  info@targetovariancancer.org.uk
-  targetovariancancer.org.uk
-  @TargetOvarian

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To access our list of references please contact us.

Registered charity numbers 1125038 (England and Wales) and SC042920 (Scotland).

This leaflet is not intended as patient information.

To order patient symptoms leaflets visit targetovariancancer.org.uk/toolkit

