

PRIMARY CARE 10 TOP TIPS

Early diagnosis of ovarian cancer in Scotland



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More women are being diagnosed with ovarian cancer following a GP referral and survival rates are improving. This follows the publication of national clinical guidelines which set out the symptoms of ovarian cancer and the appropriate diagnostic pathway. These top tips will support you in your day-to-day practice, helping you to consider ovarian cancer as a possible diagnosis and recapping recommendations from relevant guidelines.

To access free accredited online CPD modules about diagnosing ovarian cancer visit targetovariancancer.org.uk/CPD

1 Ovarian cancer should be considered if a woman presents with one or more symptoms of abdominal distension or bloating with or without abdominal pain, feeling full quickly, difficulty eating, urinary symptoms or change in bowel habit.

2 Be alert for any single symptom, or combinations of symptoms, that are frequent, persistent and unusual for the patient, particularly if they occur more than 12 times in a month.

3 Consider asking your patient to use a diary to record the frequency of their symptoms, this may help in assessing them. You or your patient can download Target Ovarian Cancer's Symptoms Diary at targetovariancancer.org.uk/symptomsdiary

4 A family history, both maternal and paternal, of ovarian and/or breast cancer can be significant.

5 Ovarian cancer may be misdiagnosed as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). First presentation with IBS in the over 50s is rare and should raise suspicion of ovarian cancer.

6 Unexplained urinary symptoms can be a sign of ovarian cancer. Repeat clear mid-stream urine should be considered with caution.

7 Guidance recommends that abdominal palpation is undertaken, CA125 blood test and urgent pelvic ultrasound carried out in women presenting with symptoms or new onset IBS (if over 50 years).

8 If symptoms persist or worsen despite a normal CA125 blood serum level and negative ultrasound scan, refer to secondary care.

9 Be clear to the patient in what circumstances you might want to see them again. If you want to see the patient within a specific timescale, make the appointment there and then.

10 General practice nurses are ideally placed to give information about ovarian cancer symptoms. 31 per cent of women mistakenly believe that a normal smear test rules out ovarian cancer. Talk to women about ovarian cancer symptoms during cervical screening appointments.

For more information on symptoms and tests, go to targetovariancancer.org.uk/GP

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To access our list of references for this publication please contact Target Ovarian Cancer.
info@targetovariancancer.org.uk