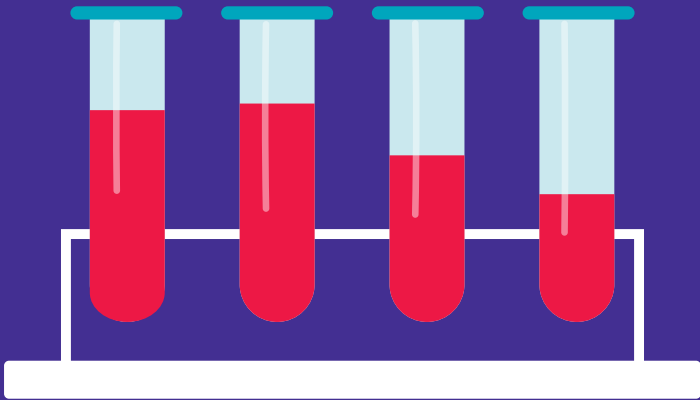


Testing for ovarian cancer: CA125 blood test and ultrasound scan



CA125 blood tests and ultrasound scans are tests used to look into symptoms that could be due to ovarian cancer.

Often your GP will arrange a CA125 blood test first. Depending on the result, or if you're still experiencing symptoms, an ultrasound scan may be ordered. Sometimes these tests may be arranged at the same time.

When should I request these tests?

If you have symptoms of ovarian cancer, you should ask your GP about having tests. The main symptoms of ovarian cancer are:



Persistent bloating (not bloating that comes and goes)



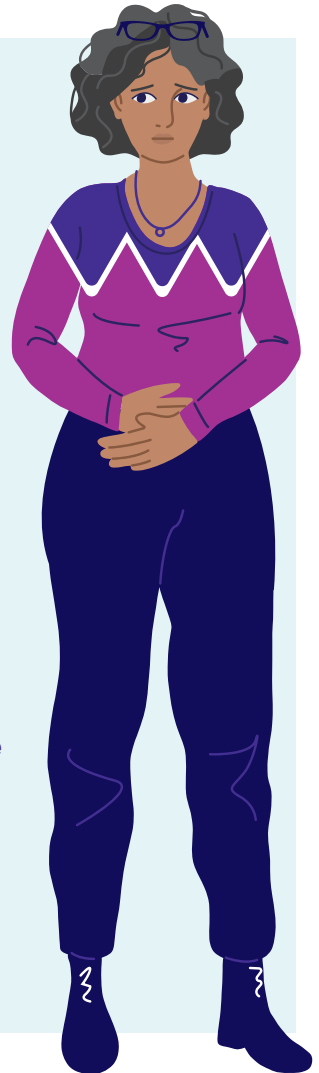
Feeling full quickly and/or loss of appetite



Pain in your tummy or pelvis (the area between your hip bones)



Needing to wee more urgently or more often than usual



Sometimes there can be other symptoms:

- ▶ Diarrhoea or constipation (pooping more or less often than normal)
- ▶ Fatigue (feeling very tired)
- ▶ Losing weight without trying
- ▶ Unusual bleeding from the vagina before the menopause or any bleeding from the vagina after the menopause.

Contact your GP surgery if you have one or more of these symptoms and they don't go away or happen frequently (such as more than 12 times a month or 3 times a week). Tell your GP if one or more relative in your close family have had cancer as it can run in families.

If you're unsure how to speak to your GP about your concerns:

- ▶ Call our free support line to speak to a specialist nurse on **0808 802 6000**
- ▶ Get tips on how to speak to your GP at targetovariancancer.org.uk/top-tips

“Please don't feel that you're wasting our time. If you have symptoms that are new and frequent, see your GP — and don't be afraid to return if they continue or you're still concerned, even if your first test is normal. Early diagnosis saves lives.”

Dr Charlotte Badescu (GP)



What is a CA125 blood test?

CA125 is a protein that's found in your blood. Ovarian cancer, as well as other conditions, can sometimes raise the level of CA125 in your blood.

During a CA125 blood test, a small sample of your blood will be taken and sent to a laboratory to measure the level of the CA125 protein. For more information about the CA125 test visit targetovariancancer.org.uk/CA125

How will my doctor use the results of the CA125 blood test?

Until recently, no matter how old you are, a CA125 level less than 35 units per millilitre (u/ml) was considered normal. A CA125 level over 35 u/ml meant you should be sent for more tests.

In April 2026 the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) updated its guidance on CA125 levels depending on someone's age. That's because research has shown that the CA125 test is less accurate for detecting ovarian cancer in younger women and that different age groups tend to have different levels of CA125 in their blood.

If you live in England, Wales or Northern Ireland and your CA125 level is higher than the level set for your age group, your doctor should send you for further tests like an ultrasound scan.

Age group (years)	CA125 level (u/ml)
40 to 49	35
50 to 59	31
60 to 69	24
70 to 79	25
80+	31

If you're 39 years old or younger, your GP should consider an urgent ultrasound scan. They may also recommend a CA125 blood test but they shouldn't use it as the only test.

If you live in Scotland, your doctor should send you for a CA125 blood test and ultrasound scan at the same time, no matter what age you are.

“ The CA125 blood test saved me! Along with the ultrasound scan, it was the first step to being taken seriously and ultimately got me diagnosed. I remember saying to the nurse, ‘So it wasn’t in my head then!’”

Lee



What if my blood test results show a high level of CA125?

A raised CA125 level doesn't mean you definitely have ovarian cancer. The level of CA125 in your blood can be high for other reasons, such as endometriosis, uterine fibroids, rheumatoid arthritis and ovarian cysts. Being on your period can also slightly raise the level. Some women have a naturally high level of CA125 in their blood.

A CA125 test on its own isn't enough to diagnose ovarian cancer. If your CA125 level is high, your GP should arrange for an ultrasound scan of your tummy and pelvis. The scan will look at your ovaries so that they can be checked for anything unusual. This ultrasound scan is usually done on an urgent basis to rule out whether your symptoms and raised CA125 level could be due to ovarian cancer.

What if I have a normal CA125 level, but I have symptoms?

It is possible to have ovarian cancer with a normal CA125 test result.

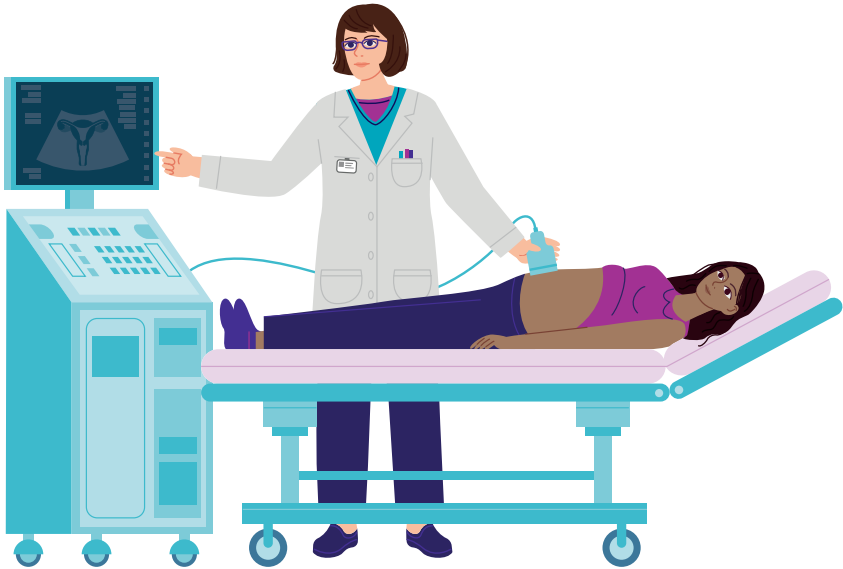
If you continue to have symptoms, you should go back to your GP within a month and ask whether you need an ultrasound scan. This is because sometimes ovarian cancer doesn't cause a raised CA125 level and an ultrasound scan is needed to check the ovaries. Your GP may also ask to repeat the CA125 blood test.

It's helpful for your GP if you track your symptoms. You can use the space at the back of this booklet to track your symptoms.

What is an ultrasound scan?

An ultrasound scan creates a picture of the tissues and organs inside your body using high-frequency soundwaves. Ultrasound scans usually take place in the radiology department at your local hospital. Your appointment letter will include details of any ways you need to prepare before your scan.

Ultrasound scans are done by a medical specialist called a **sonographer**. There are two different types of ultrasound scans used to check for ovarian cancer.



Abdominal ultrasound

This scan is used to look at the organs in your tummy and pelvis. The sonographer will put ultrasound gel on your tummy to help the ultrasound probe have good contact with your skin. They will then gently move the probe around your tummy to get a good picture of your organs.

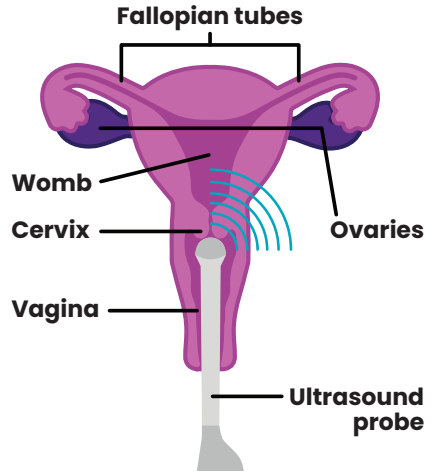
You'll need to come to the appointment with a full bladder. An abdominal ultrasound isn't painful, but you may feel some discomfort due to a full bladder.

Transvaginal ultrasound

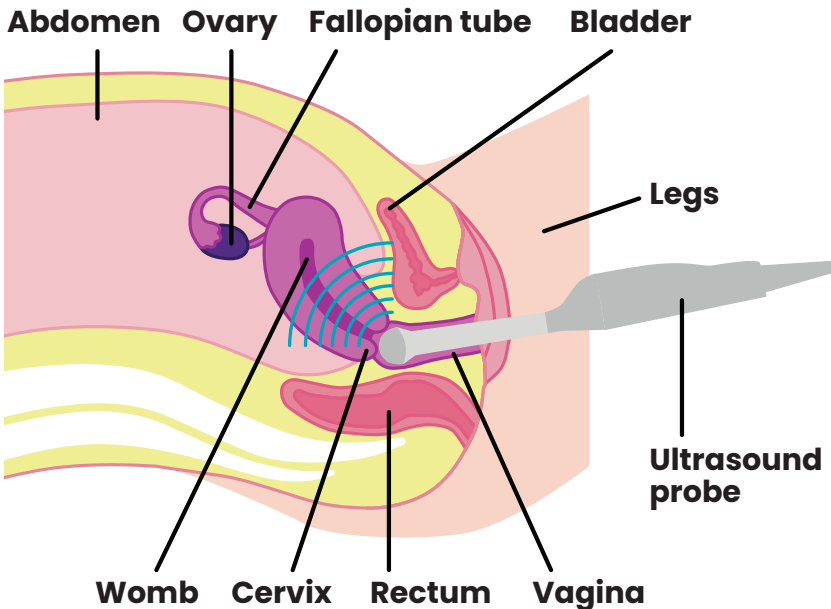
This scan is used to create a clearer picture of your reproductive organs. These include your uterus (womb), ovaries, fallopian tubes and cervix. You can have an empty bladder for this type of ultrasound.

The sonographer will put a probe into your vagina. The probe will be in a protective cover which will be covered with an ultrasound gel. The sonographer will press gently on your tummy while moving the probe to get a good picture of your reproductive organs. You may feel some mild discomfort, but it shouldn't be painful.

You can bring someone with you at any point before or during the scan.



It's OK to have a pelvic ultrasound scan while you're on your period, just let the sonographer know beforehand.



Why might I need a transvaginal ultrasound?

Sometimes it can be difficult for the sonographer to see the ovaries on an abdominal ultrasound. This is because the ovaries are very small, about the size and shape of almonds. They're buried deep within your pelvis surrounded by other organs. A transvaginal ultrasound increases the chance of getting a clear picture of your ovaries.

“Whilst having a transvaginal scan might feel a bit daunting, your health is worth more than a moment of discomfort. The scan is quick, the staff do it all the time, and it could really help. An ultrasound is a powerful tool that helps you take control, not lose it.”

Claire



How do I get my test results?

Your GP will let you know how to find out the result of your test(s) and how long it will take. You can register for online access to your medical record at your GP surgery. You can also do this on the NHS app. Ask your GP surgery if this is how you would like to access your results.

What happens next?

If you don't hear anything within two weeks, contact your GP. If you receive your results but you're unsure what they mean, your GP can explain them to you.

If the results of the tests suggest you might have ovarian cancer, you'll be referred to see a specialist called a **gynaecological oncologist** for more tests. This appointment will usually happen within two weeks.

Where can I get more support?

If you have any questions about these tests or you need practical information, support or just a listening ear, our specialist nurses are here for you.

We're open from 9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday.
Call us on **0808 802 6000**

Remember:

- ▶ Cervical screening tests – sometimes known as smear tests – will **NOT** detect ovarian cancer. There's currently no screening test for ovarian cancer.
- ▶ Most cases of ovarian cancer are diagnosed in women who have gone through the menopause. But if you're younger you can still get ovarian cancer.
- ▶ Other conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) have symptoms similar to ovarian cancer but new cases of IBS are very unlikely in women over the age of 50.
- ▶ The sooner ovarian cancer is detected, the easier it is to treat. Survival can be up to 90 per cent for women in the UK diagnosed at the earliest stage.
- ▶ Anyone born with ovaries or fallopian tubes is at risk of developing ovarian cancer. This means most women and trans men, some non-binary people, and some people who have differences in sex development are at risk of ovarian cancer. If your ovaries and fallopian tubes have been removed you are at lower risk, but a small risk still remains.



Symptoms tracker

Use this space to write down any symptoms you have

▶ **Week 1** _____
Date

▶ **Week 2** _____



Persistent bloating (not bloating that comes and goes)

M T W T F S S

M T W



Feeling full quickly and/or loss of appetite

M T W T F S S

M T W



Pain in your tummy or pelvis (the area between your hip bones)

M T W T F S S

M T W



Needing to wee more urgently or more often than usual

M T W T F S S

M T W

Other symptoms
(e.g. changes in bowel habits, fatigue, losing weight without trying or unusual bleeding from the vagina)

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_____ Date

Week 3

_____ Date

Week 4

_____ Date

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When you need information, friendly support or someone to talk to that understands, our specialist nurses are here.

**We're open 9am–5pm, Monday–Friday.
Call us on 0808 802 6000**



Get in touch for more information, support and signposting for anyone affected by ovarian cancer:



Support line: 0808 802 6000



TargetOvarianCancer



info@targetovariancancer.org.uk



@TargetOvarian



targetovariancancer.org.uk



@TargetOvarian

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liability for any loss or damage resulting from any inaccuracy in this information or third party information on websites to which we link.

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