

Cancer of the Ovary

You will be looked after by the gynaecology - oncology multidisciplinary team (MDT). The professionals who make up the MDT are experts in gynaecological cancer. They meet weekly to discuss your test results and recommend a treatment plan for you. This plan will be conveyed to you in clinic, unless alternative arrangements have been made, and a written letter of the discussion offered. Please do ask for this letter if for any reason it is not offered.

The Ovaries

The ovaries are two small oval-shaped organs which are part of the female reproductive system. During a woman's reproductive age, each month, an egg leaves one of the ovaries and passes down the fallopian tube to the womb (uterus). The ovaries also produce the female sex hormones, oestrogen and progesterone. As a woman nears the menopause the ovaries make less of these hormones and her periods gradually stop.

What causes cancer of the ovary?

The cause is unknown. In a small number of cases ovarian cancers are caused by an inherited gene in the family.

Symptoms

Most women with ovarian cancer don't have symptoms initially. When symptoms do occur they are often vague and differ widely from person to person. They can include loss of appetite, vague indigestion, nausea and a bloated feeling, swelling in the abdomen and/or pain in the lower abdomen.

Tests for diagnosis

Ultrasound scan: This can be used to check for any enlargement or abnormalities of the ovaries.

CT Scan: In this scan several small x-rays are taken of the area and fed into the computer. This builds up a detailed picture of the size and position of the cancer. Prior to the scan you will be asked to have a drink of contrast (a special liquid) to help produce good images of the bowel. The scan can take 15 – 30 minutes. You will receive specific information about the scan with your appointment letter.



MRI scan: This test is similar to the CT scan but uses magnetism instead of x-rays to build up cross-sectional pictures of your body. You will be asked to complete a safety questionnaire to establish if you have any metal work anywhere in your body, for example a pacemaker or replacement joint. The scan machine is a tunnel but is open at both ends. If you experience feelings of anxiety or claustrophobia you may find the prospect of having this test worrying. If this concerns you, please speak to your specialist nurse or doctor for advice. You may be given an injection prior to the scan to ensure good pictures are obtained. You will be informed that the



injection may cause temporary blurred vision; however the effects of this will have resolved before the end of your scan. The scan can take up to an hour to perform and is very noisy so you will be asked to wear headphones; you may wish to bring a CD with you which can be played into the headphones during the scan. You will receive specific information about the scan with your appointment letter.

Chest X-ray: This is performed to assess the condition of your lungs prior to undergoing an anaesthetic and operation.

Abdominal fluid aspiration: If there has been a build up of fluid in the abdomen a sample may be taken. This is looked at under a microscope by a doctor in the laboratory to check for any cancer cells.

Blood tests: We may request a blood test called a Ca 125 level. Ca125 is a normal blood component but if its level is raised it may indicate that you have ovarian cancer. However it can also be raised in other totally innocent conditions. We may also ask you to have blood tests to check your red blood cell count and possibly your kidney and liver function as an indicator of your general health.

Treatment

Surgery

It is the primary treatment for ovarian cancer. This will be offered if the cancer is contained to the ovary or if your consultant feels surgical removal would be beneficial. This involves total abdominal hysterectomy (information leaflet M18) removal of your uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries. In addition an omental biopsy appendectomy and lymphadenectomy may be required. In some circumstances, de-bulking surgery may be considered. This is usual scheduled after 3 cycles of chemotherapy; CT scan will help determine how well the cancer has responded to treatment. (SACT information leaflet)

Chemotherapy

When cancer has spread beyond the ovary, chemotherapy may be the recommended treatment. Chemotherapy drugs are given intravenously (into a vein) usually over a period of a few hours. It is usually given as a course of treatments allowing your body several weeks between treatments in order to recover. Chemotherapy can be given in the out patients department or as an in patient. This is dictated by scheduling of regimen.

Emotions and spirituality

It is not unusual to feel overwhelmed after being told of a cancer diagnosis. Many different emotions arise which can cause confusion and frequent mood changes. Reactions differ from one person to another – there is no right or wrong way to feel.

Treatment for ovarian cancer can affect a woman physically, emotionally and sexually. The gynaecology-oncology specialist nurse will support you, provide information and refer you to specialist services if needed.

Spiritual needs are individual and dependent on personal and philosophical beliefs. The gynaecology – oncology team will respect your beliefs and will try to meet your needs through the services available at the hospital and Big C cancer information centre.

Further help

If you feel you would like further information and/or support please do not hesitate to contact: your key-worker / Gynaecology Oncology Specialist Nurses on 01603 287742.

The Big C Family Cancer Information and Support Centre is based at the front of the hospital. Open Monday – Friday 09.30 – 16.30 Telephone: 01603 286116 www.thebigccancercentre.co.uk
Do call in, no appointment needed.

Ovacom is a nationwide support group for people with ovarian cancer and their relatives. Telephone 020 7380 9589 www.ovacom.org.uk

Pandora's Box is a local self help group for anyone affected by a gynaecology cancer. Telephone: 01603 288115 or 01603 287742

Macmillan Cancer Support can supply helpful booklets free of charge. These are accessible by visiting Macmillan.org.uk or telephone: 08088080000. These can also be accessed for you by your Gynaecology specialist nurse.

Videos about coming into hospital that are available on Youtube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nW8khhB8gA>

