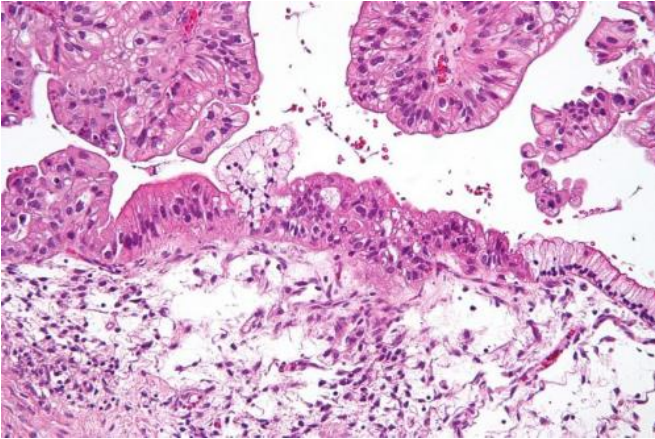


Women's wellness: Early diagnosis for ovarian cancer

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Intermediate magnification micrograph of a low malignant potential (LMP) mucinous ovarian tumour. H&E stain. The micrograph shows: Simple mucinous epithelium (right) and mucinous epithelium that pseudo-stratifies (left - diagnostic of a LMP tumour). Epithelium in a frond-like architecture is seen at the top of image. Credit: Nephron /Wikipedia. CC BY-SA 3.0

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 20,000 women in the U.S. are diagnosed with ovarian cancer each year. September is Ovarian Cancer Awareness month and physicians want to raise awareness in the hopes of helping spur earlier diagnoses.

There are several types of [ovarian cancer](#), which can include cancer of the ovaries, [fallopian tubes](#) and the lining of the peritoneum. While anyone can be at risk, ovarian cancer is most common in women over age 50 and those women who are known carriers of the BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 genes.

"The majority of ovarian cancer is sporadic but it is the fifth-leading cause of cancer deaths, due in part to the challenges with early diagnosis," says Dr. Carrie Langstraat, gynecologic surgeon at Mayo Clinic.

Common symptoms include:

- Abdominal bloating or stomach ache
- Back pain
- A feeling of fullness after eating
- Bowel changes

"These are common symptoms that women often chalk up to other things and then they aren't diagnosed until the cancer has progressed," Langstraat says. "I always encourage women to follow up with their physician if their symptoms persist. The earlier we can diagnose ovarian cancer, the better we can treat it."

SCREENING AND DIAGNOSIS

Ultrasounds and a blood test, known as a CA 125, may be useful in helping to determine a diagnosis. However, Dr. Langstraat says, there is not a great screening tool for ovarian cancer.

"For women with BRCA 1 or BRCA 2 mutations, who are at higher risk for ovarian cancer, a CA 125 test may be effective in looking for early signs," she explains. "But overall, it is not accurate enough to use for ovarian cancer screening in all women since other things, including menstruation, can increase the CA 125 level. We would like to see a better screening testing for everyone."

ADVANCES IN CARE

Due to the nature of the disease, Langstraat notes that a majority of [women](#) have a recurrence. "But new treatments are coming down the line that will hopefully contribute to a decreased risk of recurrence," she says.

Several clinical studies are underway looking at vaccines designed to prevent the recurrence of

ovarian cancer.

"Our hope is that soon we will have a better screening test for everyone and then be able to cure more patients up front," says Langstraat. "But in the meantime, I tell my patients to stay vigilant and be an advocate for yourself."

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