

## OVARIAN CANCER

### General background and statistics

Ovarian cancer refers to cancers of the ovaries. It is the fifth most common cancer in Europe for females, with around 65,600 new cases diagnosed in 2012 (4% of female cases and 2% of the total).<sup>1</sup> Ovarian cancer causes more deaths than any other type of female reproductive cancer.<sup>2</sup> Europe has one of the highest incidences of ovarian cancer in the world,<sup>3</sup> with rates being highest in Eastern and Northern Europe and lowest in Southern Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Survival in ovarian cancer is related to disease stage at diagnosis; if diagnosed early, when the cancer is confined to the ovary, up to 90% of women are likely to survive for more than five years.<sup>5</sup> However, ovarian cancer is often diagnosed at a late stage as the early symptoms can often be vague and mistaken for less serious conditions.<sup>6</sup> In Europe, about one third of women can expect to be alive five years after a diagnosis of ovarian cancer.<sup>7</sup>

There are different types of this disease, but the most common is epithelial ovarian cancer, with nine out of ten tumours of the ovary being this type.<sup>8</sup>

Full details of incidence, mortality and prevalence rates for ovarian cancer across the European countries can be viewed on the World Health Organisation's European Cancer Observatory website:<sup>4</sup> <http://eco.iarc.fr/eucan/CancerOne.aspx?Cancer=27&Gender=2>\*

\* Janssen is not responsible for the content of external websites.

### Symptoms<sup>6</sup>

The most common early symptoms of ovarian cancer include the following (however these symptoms can be vague or non-specific):

- Abdominal swelling
- Feeling full (bloating) in the abdomen and/or loss of appetite
- Pain in the lower abdomen or side
- Needing to pass urine more urgently or more frequently
- Changes in bowel habits
- Pain during sex

- Weight gain/loss
- Unexplained or extreme tiredness

It is recommended that any woman experiencing the above symptoms for a prolonged period should be checked for ovarian cancer.

## **Risk factors<sup>9</sup>**

Ovarian cancer incidence is strongly related to age, with the highest incidence rates developing after the menopause. Apart from age, factors that may increase a woman's risk include:

- A history of previous breast cancer
- Mother or sister with a history of ovarian cancer
- Presence of BRCA genes (a faulty gene, uncovered through genetic testing)
- Early onset of periods and/or late menopause
- Having no or few children
- Long-term use of hormone replacement therapy
- Endometriosis or ovarian cysts
- Obesity
- Diet high in saturated fat
- Smoking

## **Diagnosis and treatment**

There is currently no reliable screening test for ovarian cancer. However, anyone who presents with symptoms is likely to have the following tests: complete pelvic exam; transvaginal or pelvic ultrasound; CA-125 blood test (most effective when given in combination). A CT/PET scan may also be used. However, a biopsy is the definitive way to diagnose ovarian cancer.<sup>10</sup>

The initial treatment recommended for most women with ovarian cancer is surgery, followed by chemotherapy to stop the cancer recurring (although it is also given to shrink the tumour before surgery, especially in advanced cases). Radiotherapy is rarely used in ovarian cancer, but may be used in late-stage disease to relieve symptoms such as pain or bleeding.<sup>11</sup> For women with relapsed/refractory ovarian cancer (where the cancer has returned or begun to progress) treatment options are limited and often dependent on a patient's individual circumstances.

## References

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