



OVARIAN CANCER – RECOGNIZING THE EARLY SYMPTOMS



krebsliga zürich
dreh-scheibe für krebsthemen

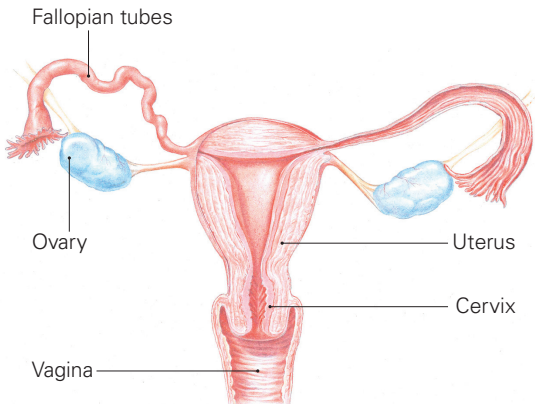
Contents

› The ovaries	4
› Risk of ovarian cancer	5
› Early detection	14
› What can I do to protect myself?	15
› Manja Gideon Foundation	16
› Useful contacts & further information	18

In those instances where persons are referred to in the feminine form it is to facilitate readability and should be understood to imply the masculine gender, and vice versa.

The ovaries

The pair of ovaries are part of the internal female reproductive organs. They are almond-shaped glands located in the lower abdomen, on either side of the uterus.



Risk of ovarian cancer

What is ovarian cancer?

Ovarian cancer (ovarian carcinoma) is a malignant tumor that develops when certain cells in the ovaries or fallopian tubes multiply uncontrollably. There are also benign ovarian tumors. Generally, two out of three ovarian tumors are benign.

How common is ovarian cancer?

In Switzerland, around 600 women develop ovarian cancer each year. This makes it one of the rarer forms of cancer. It accounts for 3% of all forms of cancer in women.

Is it possible for young women to get ovarian cancer?

The average ovarian cancer patient is diagnosed after the age of 60. Nevertheless, young women can also be affected by the disease. One out of five women affected is younger than 50 years old at the time of diagnosis.



Which factors increase the risk of developing ovarian cancer?

The exact causes of ovarian cancer are unknown. However, research has shown that the following factors and living conditions may increase your risk:

- › Over 50 years of age
- › Never having been pregnant, early onset of menstruation or undergoing late menopause (this increases the number of ovulations over the course of a lifetime).
- › Obesity
- › Genetic predisposition (BRCA mutations, etc.)
- › History of breast, uterine or colon cancer
- › Exposure to harmful substances (e.g., asbestos)
- › Hormone replacement therapy during or after menopause. The risk falls again if the hormone treatment happened several years ago.

Is ovarian cancer preventable?

There is no safeguard against the disease. However, the following factors may reduce the risk of developing ovarian cancer as they reduce the number of ovulations over the course of a woman's lifetime.

- › Taking oral contraception
- › Pregnancies
- › Breastfeeding

Removal of the ovaries at the appropriate time can help safeguard women who have an inherited predisposition.

Is ovarian cancer hereditary?

Ovarian cancer is not directly hereditary, but the predisposition to develop the disease can be inherited. Between 5% and 10% of malignant ovarian tumors are thought to show a genetic predisposition. Indications of possible familial risk might be:

- › Family history of breast or ovarian cancer
- › Incidence of hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer (HNPCC)

What can I do if one of these diseases has occurred in my family?

Talk with your family doctor or a specialist to assess your own personal risk.

How high is my risk of developing ovarian cancer if I have a BRCA gene mutation?

Approximately 0.1–0.2% of women in Switzerland carry a BRCA gene mutation, significantly increasing the risk of ovarian cancer. This is especially true for carriers of a BRCA1 mutation: approximately 40–50% of these women will develop the disease before age 70. In the case of women who carry the BRCA2 gene mutation, 10–20% will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer before reaching the same age.

How can a woman tell if she might have ovarian cancer?

Ovarian cancer often does not cause any discomfort in its early stages. This makes it even more important to seek medical advice if you have the following symptoms:

- › Persistent lower abdominal pain lasting longer than three to four weeks
- › Indigestion, constipation
- › Lack of appetite, feeling unusually full, bloating
- › Swollen or distended stomach, caused by a build-up of fluid in the abdominal area (ascites)
- › Unexplained weight loss
- › Shortness of breath caused by an accumulation of fluid in the abdomen or lungs
- › Menstrual problems, irregular periods

All of these symptoms may indicate other, minor ailments, but they should always be evaluated by a physician.



Early detection

The earlier a tumor is discovered, the better the treatment options and prospects of recovery.

In three out of four women affected, ovarian cancer is not detected until an advanced stage, which means that the five-year survival rate drops to 20%.

In other words, only about one fifth of patients are still living five years after being diagnosed.

How can I detect ovarian cancer early?

In contrast to breast or colon cancer, there is no method for early detection of ovarian cancer. For this reason, it is even more important to see a doctor if you experience symptoms. Be alert for the symptoms described here and do not hesitate to bring up the possibility of ovarian cancer with your doctor. Because the earlier ovarian cancer is detected the better.

What can I do to protect myself?

Pay attention to what your body is telling you: if you experience changes that seem unusual to you or if you have persistent complaints, always have these checked by your doctor.

Live a healthy lifestyle: not smoking, eating a balanced diet, getting regular exercise and limiting sun exposure lower your risk of cancer. According to the World Health Organization, one third of all cancers could be prevented if we were willing to change our behavior in these risk areas.

Manja Gideon Foundation

The objective of the Manja Gideon Foundation is to advance widespread awareness and knowledge of ovarian cancer and its symptoms for those affected and their families, interested individuals, physicians and organizations. In addition, the charitable foundation promotes measures and projects for research, improved prevention and treatment of the disease.

Our founder, Manja Gideon, aimed to bring the disease out of the shadows and into public awareness, sparing other women what led to her own loss of life: "I would like to enable those who are affected to ask doctors the right questions. If even one single life were to be saved through my foundation, I would be the happiest of women."

Symptoms of ovarian cancer are often mistaken for those of other, less serious ailments.



Being aware of the signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer can save lives!

www.manja-gideon-foundation.org

IBAN: CH330020620642290201R



manja gideon
stiftung

alles über
eierstockkrebs

Useful addresses & further information

Krebsliga des Kantons Zürich

Tel. 044 388 55 00

info@krebsligazuerich.ch

www.krebsligazuerich.ch

Helpline

Tel. 0800 11 88 11

Calls are free of charge

helpline@krebsliga.ch

Brochures

- › Eierstockkrebs - Ovarialtumoren
- › Familiäres Risiko für Brust- und Eierstockkrebs

Ordering options

- › Tel. 0844 85 00 00
- › kundendienst@krebsliga.ch
- › www.krebsliga.ch/shop

About us

Publisher

Krebsliga des Kantons Zürich
Freiestrasse 71
8032 Zürich

Tel. 044 388 55 00, Fax 044 388 55 11

info@krebsligazuerich.ch

www.krebsligazuerich.ch

Author / Editorial Management

Monika Burkhalter, Director Prevention Program,
Krebsliga Zürich

In accordance with brochures of the Swiss Cancer League

Experts and editorial collaboration

Krebsliga Schweiz
Professor emeritus Felix Gutzwiller, MD
Professor René Hornung, MD
Michael Rabner, MD

Translation

Jane White, white-english.ch

Editing

Rona Elliott

Graphic Design

Paolo Monaco, monacografico.ch

Images / Photographs

Cover image: iStock, Milos Jokic
Illustration, page 4: © Daniel Haldemann / Krebsliga Schweiz
Double-page photograph: iStock, Ocskaymark

© 2017, Krebsliga des Kantons Zürich, Zurich



manja gideon
stiftung



krebsliga zürich
drehscheibe für krebsthemen

Recommended by

gynécologie
suisse

Société Suisse de Gynécologie et Obstétrique
Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Gynäkologie und Geburtshilfe
Società Svizzera di Ginecologia e Ostetricia