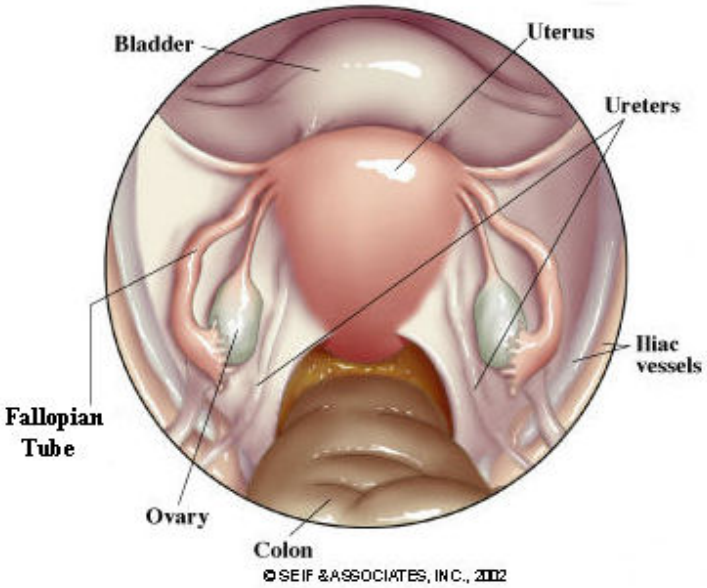
Ovarian Tumors

The ovaries are small organs that produce eggs in women. They lie on each side of the uterus. Tumors are solid growths on the ovary, not like ovarian cysts that are filled with fluid. They can be cancerous or noncancerous. All solid tumors should be looked at to make sure they are not cancer tumors.



CAUSES

There are no known causes for developing a solid tumor on the ovary. However, there are several risk factors for developing cancerous tumors on the ovary, such as:

- Aging.
- North American or North European descent.
- Personal or family history of ovarian, colon and breast cancer.
- Women with BRCA 1 or BRCA 2 genes are at high risk for getting ovarian cancer.
- The use of fertility medications to get pregnant may increase the risk for getting ovarian cancer.
- Late menopause (after age 50).
- Women who become pregnant for the first time at 30 or older.

Having these risk factors does not mean you will get ovarian cancer. However, you should know about them and report any that you have to your caregiver. Also, a woman with none of these risk factors can still get ovarian cancer.

SYMPTOMS

In many cases there are no symptoms. Noncancerous tumors usually have no symptoms but cancerous tumors may have symptoms that are minor and resemble other health problems. The following are symptoms that may be important to diagnosing cancer of the ovary:

- Unexplained weight loss.
- Increase abdominal size.
- Pain in the belly (*abdomen*).
- Pain or pressure in the back and pelvis.
- Tiredness.
- Abnormal vaginal bleeding.
- Loss of appetite.
- Frequent urination or pressure on your bladder.
- Indigestion, increase gas and bloating.
- Painful sexual intercourse.

DIAGNOSIS

- During an exam, an abnormal mass may be found in the pelvis. It is important to have a rectovaginal examination to help find pelvic masses, especially in women over 40 years old.
- An ultrasound may be done.
- X-ray, CT scan or MRI imaging.
- Blood tests.
- A Pap test does not help in diagnosing tumors or cancer of the ovary. New screening tests are always being studied to detect early ovarian cancer.

TREATMENT

- All solid tumors of the ovary should be evaluated, usually with surgery, to make sure they are not cancerous.

- The tumor will be studied in the lab under the microscope to see if it is cancer.
- Noncancerous tumors can be removed surgically with or without removing the ovary.
- Cancerous tumors usually are removed with the ovary and sometimes both ovaries are removed with the Fallopian tubes, uterus and surrounding lymph nodes to see if the cancer has spread.
- Cancerous tumors may also be treated along with the surgery with radiation, chemotherapy or both.
- The surgeon should be a gynecology oncologist (cancer specialist in gynecology cancer surgery) and the chemotherapist and radiation therapist should be experienced specialists in their field.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Inform your caregiver if you or anyone in your family has had cancer.
- Follow your caregiver's advice and recommendations regarding medications and follow up care.
- Get a yearly physical and gynecology exams. This includes a rectovaginal exam if you are 40 years old or older.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have any of the above symptoms that have not gone away after a week of treatment.
- You are losing weight for no reason.
- You feel generally ill.

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