

Ovarian and Prostate Cancers: What You Need to Know

Knowledge is powerful – and perhaps even lifesaving. Ovarian and prostate cancer are two of the most common diseases, respectively, for women and men. By knowing the signs and symptoms, people can catch these diseases earlier and start getting the treatment they need.

Visit these webpages ([Ovarian Cancer](#), [Prostate Cancer](#)) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to learn much more about the diseases – including risk factors, treatments and information about possibly lowering your risk – and read on for the most important information about signs, symptoms and screenings.



Ovarian Cancer: The Basics

Cancers are diseases where abnormal cells grow uncontrollably in a person's body. The type of cancer is always named for where the cancer starts. Ovarian cancer originates in a woman's ovaries, part of the female reproductive system located in the pelvis area. According to the [American Cancer Society](#)[®], over 21,000 women in

the U.S. will receive a new diagnosis of ovarian cancer this year, and almost 14,000 American women will die from the disease in 2021.

Signs and Symptoms of Ovarian Cancer

Women in middle adulthood and beyond, and those with close family members (such as a mother, sister, aunt or grandmother) who've had ovarian cancer, are at a higher risk for the disease. However – as noted by the CDC – many women get ovarian cancer, not just those considered “high risk.” That’s why it’s so important to look out for the signs and symptoms.

Pay attention to your body and watch for these:

- Vaginal bleeding (particularly if you’re past menopause) or discharge from your vagina that’s not normal for you.
- Pressure or pain in your pelvic area.
- Abdominal or back pain.
- Bloating.
- Feeling full too quickly or difficulty eating.
- A change in your bathroom habits, such as a more frequent or urgent need to urinate, or constipation.

If you have unusual vaginal bleeding, see your doctor **right away**. And if you have any of the other symptoms for two weeks or longer – and they’re not normal for you – see your doctor.

Testing for Ovarian Cancer

Unfortunately, there’s no reliable way to screen for ovarian cancer before symptoms develop. However, once someone notices symptoms – hopefully early – they can get a diagnostic test to determine if they do or do not have the disease. **Therefore, it’s very important to know your body and always be on the lookout for the signs and symptoms.** If you notice any of these, talk to your doctor and ask if you should get a diagnostic test – such as a rectovaginal pelvic exam, transvaginal ultrasound or CA-125 blood test. Your symptoms may indeed be caused by something other than cancer, but it’s important to find out.

Prostate Cancer: The Basics

For men, prostate cancer is among the most important diseases to know about. As the name implies, it’s a cancer that starts in the prostate, part of the male reproductive system located right below the bladder. According to the [American Cancer Society](#), almost a quarter-million men in the U.S. will receive a new diagnosis of prostate cancer in 2021 alone, and more than 34,000 American men will die from the disease this year. About 1 in 8 men get prostate cancer at some point in their life.

Signs and Symptoms of Prostate Cancer

All men are at risk for prostate cancer, and the older you get, the greater the chance of getting the disease. According to the CDC, the signs and symptoms are different for different men, and some don’t notice symptoms at all. However, some common ones to look out for include:

- Weak or interrupted flow of urine.
- Frequent urination, especially during the night.
- Trouble emptying your bladder completely.
- Burning or pain during urination.

- Blood in your urine or semen.
- Painful ejaculation.
- Pain in your back, pelvis or hips that doesn't go away.

If you have any of these symptoms, talk to your doctor right away. They may be caused by something other than prostate cancer, but it's important to find out as soon as you can.

Screening for Prostate Cancer

You can also get regular screenings to see if you have prostate cancer – even before symptoms develop. A **PSA (prostate specific antigen) test** is the best method. It's important to talk with your doctor to see if this is right for you. Screening can greatly help those who develop the types of prostate cancer that grow and spread quickly. However, most prostate cancers grow slowly or not at all. Therefore, the CDC recommends that men learn about the [advantages and disadvantages of PSA testing](#) and talk to their doctor about whether it's right for them.

All types of cancer – including prostate and ovarian – are worrisome. But by knowing what to look for, paying attention to your body and always being open with your doctor, you can be better prepared for whatever the future brings.

Interested in learning more? Check out these links:

- Listen to [this informative podcast](#) about ovarian cancer, from Sarah Bush Lincoln Health System.
- Learn about [one woman's story](#) of confronting ovarian cancer, from our partners at Carle Health. And two other women's stories – in [this short video](#) from Springfield Clinic and [this blog post](#) from FirstHealth of the Carolinas.
- [OSF HealthCare explains](#) how getting your yearly prostate exam can save your life.
- Knowledge is key – learn seven signs and symptoms of prostate cancer in [this blog article](#) from Reid Health.
- Read about one man's story confronting prostate cancer, in [this piece](#) from Memorial Health System.

For information on coverage and costs (if applicable) for specific tests and screenings, please see your health plan documents or call the number on the back of your member ID card. We're always glad to answer any questions you may have.