Ultrasound may better classify ovarian tumors

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An elevated level of the protein CA-125 in blood is considered an indicator of whether an ovarian tumor is benign or malignant. This measure, however, can often be inaccurate. Another option is an ultrasound examination of the tumor. An experienced ultrasound examiner can often accurately classify an ovarian tumor using a method of pattern recognition.

Dirk Timmerman, M.D., Ph.D., of Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium and colleagues conducted a prospective study of 1,066 women to compare the ability of these two methods to discriminate between benign and malignant ovarian tumors. All of the women had an ultrasound examination within 120 days of their surgery to remove the tumor. Of these women, 809 had given blood samples before their surgery, and these samples were later analyzed for CA-125.

They found that experienced ultrasound examiners correctly classified 93 percent of the tumors as benign or malignant, while CA-125 levels correctly classified 83 percent of tumors at best.

“We hope our results will encourage responsible parties to expend more effort and more resources to educate and train those who perform gynecologic ultrasound examinations, so that the potential of the ultrasound technique can be maximized,” the authors write.

Source: Journal of the National Cancer Institute

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