

# African American Women with ovarian cancer—can obesity mask early symptoms?

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African American women with ovarian cancer are more likely to die from the disease than are White women and they are also much more likely to be obese. These factors may be linked by the new finding that excess abdominal fat in overweight and obese women could interfere with the detection of early symptoms of ovarian cancer, as presented in a study published in *Journal of Women's Health*.

Women with higher [body mass index](#) (BMI) scores had symptoms of ovarian cancer for a longer period of time before diagnosis, report Chioma Erondy, MD and coauthors from Duke University School of Medicine and Duke University Medical Center (Durham, NC), Medical University of South Carolina (Charleston, SC), Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey (New Brunswick), Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine (Cleveland, OH), Baylor College of Medicine (Houston, TX), Wayne State University School of Medicine (Detroit, MI), University of Alabama at Birmingham, Louisiana State University School of Public Health (New Orleans), University of Virginia (Charlottesville), and University of Tennessee-Knoxville in the article entitled "The Association between Body Mass Index and Presenting Symptoms in African American Women with Ovarian Cancer."

No effective screening method exists for ovarian cancer, and most cases are detected after a woman experiences one or more symptoms, usually pelvic or abdominal discomfort, irregular bowel function, or bloating. In this study, about 60% of the women were obese (BMI >30) and 94% reported at least one symptom during the year prior to diagnosis. Women with the highest BMI scores experienced most symptoms more frequently and for longer duration than did women with lower scores.

"This important finding could impact the existing racial disparity in death associated with [ovarian cancer](#) by making physicians aware of the need to be especially vigilant for [symptoms](#) in obese [women](#) that might otherwise go undetected," says Susan G. Kornstein, MD, Editor-in-Chief

of *Journal of Women's Health*, Executive Director of the Virginia Commonwealth University Institute for Women's Health, Richmond, VA, and President of the Academy of Women's Health.

**More information:** Chioma O. Erondy et al, The Association Between Body Mass Index and Presenting Symptoms in African American Women with Ovarian Cancer, *Journal of Women's Health* (2016). [DOI: 10.1089/jwh.2015.5359](https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2015.5359)

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