

# Know the risks, warning signs of ovarian cancer

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(HealthDay)—Women need to be aware their risk for ovarian cancer

increases with age. Half of all cases affect women age 63 or older, according to specialists at Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia.

However, the center reminds all [women](#) to be aware of other risk factors for the disease, as well as common ovarian cancer warning signs, such as:

- Belly bloating or swelling,
- Lower belly pain,
- Back pain,
- Trouble eating or feeling full quickly,
- Unexplained weight loss,
- Pain during sex,
- Menstrual changes,
- A change in bathroom habits, such as constipation, diarrhea, or having to urinate very badly or very often.

"While these symptoms are common and may be caused by something other than ovarian cancer, I advise women to take them seriously," said Dr. Christina Chu, a Fox Chase gynecologic oncologist.

"A woman knows what is normal for her own body. If her symptoms don't seem normal and last for two weeks or longer, she should bring them to her doctor's attention," Chu said in a hospital news release.

Ovarian cancer accounts for about 3 percent of all cancers among women but causes more deaths than any other cancer involving the female reproductive system, the American Cancer Society reports.

Aside from older age, the center says [risk factors](#) for ovarian cancer include:

- **A family history of ovarian, breast or colon cancer:** If your mother, sister or daughter has had ovarian cancer, you are at

greater risk for developing it. The more relatives with the disease, the greater the risk.

- **Inherited gene mutation:** Up to 10 percent of [ovarian cancers](#) stem from an inherited gene mutation, such as BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene mutations. Other genetic mutations that cause certain syndromes are also associated with ovarian and other forms of cancer. "I advise women who have a family history of cancers, such as breast, ovarian, colon and endometrial cancer, to speak with their physician regarding their history risk, so they, together, can determine next steps," said Chu.
- **Reproductive history:** Having a full-term pregnancy before the age of 26 can lower risk for the disease. The more children women have, the lower their risk for ovarian cancer. Breast-feeding also lowers women's risk for this type of cancer.
- **Birth control:** Using birth control pills for just three to six months may help lower risk for ovarian cancer. Taking them longer may further reduce risk for the disease. This benefit of the pill may persist for many years after women stop taking it.
- **Hormone therapy:** Hormone replacement therapy after menopause may increase risk for ovarian cancer, particularly if estrogen without progesterone is taken for more than five years.
- **Other risk factors:** Obesity and breast cancer may also elevate a woman's chances of developing ovarian cancer.

**More information:** The American Cancer Society provides more information on [ovarian cancer](#).

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