

5 Things You Should Know About Ovarian Cancer

Fast facts about this silent killer.

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For one thing, a sensible diet and regular exercise are not enough to lower your risk of ovarian cancer. By Estelle Low



The symptoms of ovarian cancer are not obvious and can be easily mistaken for less severe conditions. Photo: szefei / www.123rf.com

You may think that eating sensibly and keeping to your fitness routine are sufficient to stay healthy. But that may not be the case when it comes to cancer. Recent studies have found a link between obesity (body mass index of > 30) and ovarian cancer.

In light of **World Ovarian Cancer Day** (May 8), read on to find out more about this deadly gynaecologic cancer. PS: It can affect anyone!

#1 Ovarian cancer is the fifth most common cancer among women in Singapore.

From 2010 to 2014, ovarian cancer affected more than 1,700 women in Singapore, according to data from the [National Registry of Diseases Office](#). It's the fifth most common cancer, after breast (29.2 per cent), colorectal (13.3 per cent), lung (7.6 per cent) and uterine (6.6 per cent) cancer.

(Also read: [Cancer Screening Tips](#))

#2 Being overweight increases your risk of ovarian cancer.

An increasing number of studies have found a link between obesity (body mass index of 30 and above) and ovarian cancer, says Dr Kelly Loi, obstetrician and gynaecologist at Mount Elizabeth Hospital. That could be due to the following:

- Obese people have more fat tissue, which is responsible for producing the hormone oestrogen. High levels of oestrogen have been associated with increased risk of breast, endometrial and some other cancers.
- Fat cells produce hormones called adipokines, as well as other chemicals which may stimulate the growth of cancerous cells.
- Obese people have increased levels of insulin and insulin-like growth factor-1 (IGF-1) in their blood, which may promote the development of tumours.
- Obese people often have chronic low-level inflammation, which has been associated with increased cancer risk.

#3 The use of talcum powder may be linked to ovarian cancer.

Avoid putting talcum powder between your legs or near your genitals, Dr Loi advises. In theory, talcum powder could travel up into the vagina, and then through the cervix into the womb. If the powder works its way down the fallopian tubes to the ovaries, it could cause irritation. Constant irritation could cause inflammation and lead to cancerous changes in cells.

(Also read: [Can Talcum Powder Really Cause Cancer?](#))

#4 You may not be able to tell if you have ovarian cancer.

Unlike other cancers, symptoms of ovarian cancer aren't easy to spot as they are not obvious, says Dr Loi. Plus, some symptoms are similar to those of non-cancerous conditions, so they can be easily overlooked, resulting in ovarian cancer being diagnosed at a late stage.

The symptoms include:

- Bloating or a feeling of fullness in the abdomen, which may be mistaken for indigestion
- A swollen abdomen, which may be mistaken for weight gain
- Loss of appetite
- Tiredness

Early detection improves your chances of survival vastly, so consult your specialist if you frequently experience those symptoms.

(Also read: [What's Causing Your Stomach Ache?](#))

#5 A Pap smear does not detect ovarian cancer.

The Pap test merely detects cervical cancer by screening potentially pre-cancerous and cancerous cells in the cervix. Screening methods for ovarian cancer include a blood test to measure levels of blood marker CA-125, as well as a pelvic ultrasound scan to assess the ovaries.

<http://www.shape.com.sg/health/5-things-you-should-know-about-ovarian-cancer>