

# Ovarian cysts signs and symptoms



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## Ovarian Cysts - The Silent Troublemaker

- Jasmine Price

There are many illnesses and abnormalities that can have hidden symptoms. Ovarian cysts are one of those things that can go undetected unless it starts causing pain or is seen on a routine ultrasound. Every day, hundreds of women get an ovarian cyst without even knowing it is there. The following is an example of a patient who came into the doctor for one thing and ended up being diagnosed with something else entirely.

A 20 year old woman, Patricia Reynolds, came to the doctor complaining of weight gain. She had gained 7 pounds in the past month and says her diet has not changed. She started taking birth control pills 6 weeks ago. She also mentioned that she has been working a lot. The doctor suspected that the sudden weight gain was brought on by the start of taking the birth control pills. Her recent rigorous work schedule could also be contributing to the weight gain by adding stress and not letting her get enough sleep. The doctor gave her some sample diet plans and exercises to do and suggested that she try to get more sleep. The doctor told her to make another appointment if the weight gain has not stopped or has gotten worse in 6-8 weeks.

Due to the fluid retention when first starting on the birth control pill, some women can experience some minor weight gain. However, this weight gain is usually temporary and should go away within a couple of months (WebMD).

There are many possibilities to the cause of unintentional weight gain besides consuming too many calories. Not getting the recommended amount

of sleep can lead to poor food choices, lack of exercise and less energy (Mann). Stress as well can lead to bad eating habits which will cause someone to gain weight (Creagan). Many women don't realize that gaining weight could be the result of something more serious than just eating too much.

7 weeks later, Patricia came to the doctor's office still complaining of some weight gain, but this time there were added symptoms. Along with the weight gain, she had been experiencing periodic abdominal pain, nausea and occasionally pain during sex. The doctor first had her take a pregnancy test as a precaution so they could rule pregnancy out. After that came back negative, the doctor ordered an ultrasound. The results of the ultrasound showed a small liquid filled mass on the outer surface of her ovary. Patricia was diagnosed with a cystadenoma – a type of ovarian cyst.

Ovarian cysts are very common in women who have not gone through menopause yet. Women have two ovaries positioned on each side of their uterus (Mayo Clinic). A cyst is a fluid filled sac that can develop anywhere in the body (Women's Health). Ovarian cysts can appear in or on the ovaries. Functional cysts are not that uncommon and do not need to be surgically removed most of the time. With some ovarian cysts, women could not even experience symptoms or know that they are there. Most functional cysts will go away on their own and are not cancerous (Women's Health). There are some ovarian cysts, however, that can cause pain, can be cancerous and may need to be surgically removed. Some symptoms of ovarian cysts are nausea, breast tenderness, abdominal pain and abnormal bleeding. Some symptoms on the severe side, for which you need to be treated for

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immediately, are dizziness and rapid breathing. If any woman experiences these symptoms, it is important to go see your family doctor or OB/GYN. These symptoms could appear because of ovarian cysts or many other abnormalities of the female reproductive system.

The knowledge of having a cyst on her ovary gave Patricia anxiety. The doctor reassured her that it appears to be benign and should not lead to ovarian cancer. However, since the mass of the cyst was solid and causing her pain, the doctor recommended that she get a laparoscopy done to remove the cyst before it got any bigger. She went through with the minor procedure and after recovery did not experience anymore symptoms. It is likely that Patricia will get more ovarian cysts in her lifetime, especially since she is only 20 years old, but chances are that all or most of them will be harmless and disappear on their own.

Depending on the severity of the ovarian cyst, there are several ways to go about treating or removing it. Functional cysts should not be worried about and should go away on their own. Taking birth control pills will help prevent ovarian cysts from appearing in the future (Mayo Clinic). If the cyst is painful, large and/or growing, the doctor will most likely want to remove it. If the cyst can be easily removed then the doctor will probably perform a cystectomy where just the cyst is removed and the ovary stays intact. If the cyst has damaged the ovary then a oophorectomy will be performed to remove the entire affected ovary. If the cyst has developed into ovarian cancer then the doctor most likely need to do a hysterectomy - removing the uterus and both the ovaries (Mayo Clinic).

Although the symptoms were hidden at first, the growth and pain of the ovarian cyst led the doctor to order an ultrasound and obtain the right diagnosis. Ovarian cysts are very common in women who are in their childbearing years and have not reached menopause yet (Women's Health). Ovarian cysts appear in 30% of females with regular menstrual cycles, 50% of females with irregular menstrual cycles and 6% of postmenopausal females (Duklewski). Most of the time, ovarian cysts are not dangerous, but there are many cases where they can grow and become cancerous. The American Cancer Society predicts that there will be almost 22, 000 women diagnosed with ovarian cancer in the United States in 2014 (American Cancer Society). Ovarian cancer is ranked 5 in the most deadly cancers in women, a risk of 1 in 72 women getting it (American Cancer Society). If caught early enough, ovarian cancer can be prevented. It is important that women get checked out by their doctor if they are experiencing any of the harmful symptoms ovarian cysts can cause. It is recommended that women have yearly visits to their OB/GYN for examinations in order to identify any irregularities.

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