

# Raising awareness on the manifestation of ovarian cancer

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The word cancer is a frightening term for anyone, especially because there are over 200 different types of cancer that can affect various parts of the body. Certain types of cancer can vary between men and women, but a particular cancer that affects roughly 22, 000 women each year and has been known as “ the silent killer” is ovarian cancer. Ovarian cancer, as it’s name implies, affect the ovaries which are a main part of a woman’s reproductive system. Even though ovarian cancer only accounts for 3% of cancers in women, it causes more deaths than any other type of cancer of the female reproductive system. (American Cancer Society, 2013)

Two major organizations that educate and raise awareness to this cancer would be: The American Cancer Society and The Cleveland Clinic. Combined, these articles on cancer paint a clear picture of prevention, symptoms, risks, and survival rate. All the information provided are things women need to know and can potentially save lives if you’re aware of the signs, prevention and risk of this cancer.

Ovarian cancer is known as the silent killer, because it is a challenge trying to detect this cancer due to minimum symptoms in earlier stages, which makes it hard to catch before it is able to metastasize to other parts of the female body. “ Unfortunately, early ovarian cancer is hard to detect and there are no good screening tools. Many cases of ovarian cancer are found after the cancer has spread to other organs. In these cases, the cancer is much more difficult to treat and cure.” (The Cleveland Clinic, 2011)

Composed of 3 different types of cells, the ovaries are two almond sized reproductive organs that produce ova or eggs for reproduction, and are also the main source for the hormones estrogen and progesterone. There are 3  
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different types of tumors when involving this cancer. “ There are 3 main types of ovarian tumors: Epithelial tumors start from the cells that cover the outer surface of the ovary. Most ovarian tumors are epithelial cell tumors, Germ cell tumors start from the cells that produce the eggs (ova) and Stromal tumors start from structural tissue cells that hold the ovary together and produce the female hormones estrogen and progesterone.” (American Cancer Society, 2013)

The cause of this cancer remains unknown, but according to the American Cancer Society, up to 10% of ovarian cancer results in the inherited tendency to develop the disease. Meaning, genetics do play a small role in developing and being diagnosed with this cancer. Other risks include age, previous health problems related to cancer, early menopause, and even certain fertility drugs. “ The first sign of ovarian cancer is usually an enlarged ovary. The ovaries are located deep within the pelvic cavity, so swelling may go unnoticed until later stages.” (Cleveland Clinic, 2011) Symptoms increase with severity, similar to other cancers. Nausea, major shift in weight (loss or gain), leg pain and swelling, urinary problems, pain during intercourse and swollen abdomen are just some of the side effects of this cancer.

In order to come to a full conclusion a women has ovarian cancer, doctors will run numerous tests. These tests include biopsy, blood tests, pelvic ultrasound, laparoscopy, laparotomy, MRI scan and CT scan. These of course are all after your basic physical exams, and will depend on what type of tumor is suspected. Ovarian cancer can be treated with chemotherapy, radiation therapy, surgery, and hormone therapy. “ Paclitaxel (Taxol) and

cisplatin (Platinol) are drugs commonly used to treat ovarian cancer.”

(Cleveland Clinic, 2011)

The survival rate of this cancer seems to decrease the more the cancer metastasizes. “ If ovarian cancer is found (and treated) before the cancer has spread outside the ovary, the 5-year relative survival rate is 92%.

However, only 15% of all ovarian cancers are found at this early stage.”

(American Cancer Society, 2013)

My research ties in with my current Biology of Women, because this is a cancer that affects a lot of important biological factors in women. I feel like this cancer is especially important for women because it does effect the reproductive system and that is a big part of a lot of womens lives. Ovarian cancer was discussed in Chapter 11, which was the chapter designated to cancer. Biology is defined as the study of living organisms, and cancer definitely affects living organisms and how we study them. Biology is used to break down and understand cancer as a biological process.

I was nervous to research this cancer, but I felt I should educate myself on the topic for personal reasons. A close relative of mine was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and there’s always the possibility of inheriting certain cancer cells, so I fee like the information I’ve educated myself with will play an important role in my future. I’m not too worried about ovarian cancer right now, because it’s one of those things that affects women later in adult hood. I will be making proper life style changes to decrease the chances as much as possible from getting ovarian or any other type of cancer. The chance that this cancer may be apart of my life in the future is scary but not a for sure

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thing, so I will be cautious and make sure I am getting the proper exams needed, by medical professionals.

Between the American Cancer Society and The Cleveland Clinic, both provide a solid foundation of information about ovarian cancer. The American Cancer Society provided a more thorough and detailed look into this cancer than The Cleveland Clinic. There are some discrepancies between my text book, *Visualizing Human Biology* and the information provided by The American Cancer Society. The text book says, " Ovarian cancer is the sixth most common form of cancer in females," but American Cancer Society claims the cancer is the ninth most common cancer when it comes to women. All articles agree when it comes to ovarian cancer ranking the highest deaths among reproductive cancers.

I detected little to no bias when researching this cancer. A lack of information was found when it comes to risk factors though. American Cancer Society and our text book *Visualization of Human Biology* both stated that Caucasian females were at greater risk of this cancer. Also, certain cause and prevention information was overlooked in the Cleveland Clinic's article. American Cancer Society states that, back pain, constipation and urinary urgency and frequency can be signs or symptoms of ovarian cancer. Otherwise all other information was clear cut and each article supported one another.

The good news is, this killer cancer is slowly being silenced. " The rate at which women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer has been slowly falling over the past 20 years." (American Cancer Society, 2013) Staying aware and

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having regular check ups with your doctor is the best way to prevent this cancer or to catch it early if it develops. Also, women on birth control pills have half the chance of developing ovarian cancer. Ovarian cancer can be dangerous if it goes unnoticed. In order to prevent or decrease risks of getting this cancer women should eat a healthy low fat diet, have a yearly pelvic exam and make sure you're discussing hereditary risk factors with your primary care provider. (Cleveland Clinic, 2011)