



New Mexico Moms! Stop Ovarian Cancer Being The “Silent Killer”



Please read this information and pass it on to your friends and family

- Do you think that ovarian cancer only strikes post menopausal, childless women?
- Do you feel protected because you have previously taken the Pill?
- Do you think that there is no link between breast cancer and ovarian cancer?
- Do you think that ovarian cancer is only caused by hormonal factors and not environmental ones?

If you answered “**Yes**” to any of the questions above, I strongly urge you to read on.

*Hi, my name is Kay and I'm Mom to 5 year old twins Abby and Hannah. Probably like you, 3 years ago, I thought **ovarian cancer** only struck post-menopausal women, and particularly those who had not had children. That lack of knowledge, and also ignoring what my body was, very subtly, trying to tell me, caused me to go from a clean gynecological bill of health in March of '06 to advanced stage ovarian cancer in November of that year. Now, nearly 3 years on, after an eight hour operation, six months of chemotherapy and 2 clinical drug trials, I am in remission. But as you will see, the story doesn't end here. That's why **every women needs to know the warning signs and how to take action.***

Ovarian Cancer

is a cancer that forms in tissues of the ovary or in the surrounding peritoneal cavity (the inside wall surrounding the abdomen and uterus). There are two main types, the most common of which is ovarian epithelial carcinoma. This begins in cells on the surface of the ovary/peritoneal wall and accounts for 60-90% of all cases (www.ovariancancer.org). The spread of these cancerous cells induces fluid to build up, which quickly carries the malignant cells around the peritoneal cavity to organs as distant as the liver, lymph nodes, and diaphragm.

The Frightening Statistics

(www.ovariancancer.org; www.seer.cancer.gov)

Most cancer statistics are frightening! but for ovarian cancer they are doubly so:

- Ovarian cancer occurs in **1 out of 72 women.**
- **The mean 5 year survival rate is 46%.** For women under 65, it rises to 57%. Remember, though, that this includes women who have a recurrence, and does not take account of staging. For advanced stage cancers, the rates are lower.

- About **15,000** women in the United States die from ovarian cancer each year.

But most remarkably.....

- **If caught early**, before the cancer has spread outside of the ovaries, **the 5 year survival rate is 93%,**
- Only 19% of cases are found this early (NY Times June 13, 2007 *Symptoms Found for Early Check on Ovary Cancer*)

First line treatment – hysterectomy (removal of uterus and ovaries), removal of tumors, chemotherapy – will allow 60-80% of advanced stage cancer patients to achieve full remission. Past research has done a very good job of removing almost all evidence of cancer through this approach. However, by its nature, microscopic epithelial cells tend to remain behind and can, after lying dormant for months or years, start to become active again. This is called **recurrence**.

- Around **80%** of all women who reach full remission, through first line therapy, will **have a recurrence**

(<http://ovariancancer.jhmi.edu/recurrentqa.cfm>).

As reported by Deborah Armstrong M.D, Johns Hopkins University:

"We're good at getting people into the initial remission. We're just not so good at keeping them there."

Although most cases of ovarian cancer are reported in women over 50 (the mean age at diagnosis is 63), 32% of cases are in women under 54 (www.ovariancancer.org). For women younger women than 45 its 13%.

So what are the risk factors and symptoms and what can be done to avoid the trauma that this disease can bring to a family.

Risk Factors for Younger Women

(taken from www.wcn.org Women's Cancer Network)

- A mother or sister who has had breast cancer. The hereditary BRCA-1/2 genes carry mutations for both breast and ovarian cancer. If you have a family history of either, a blood test can evaluate your risk.
- You have endometriosis.
- You have low estrogen or have taken estrogen replacement therapy.
- You started menstruating early (before 12) or late (after 15).
- You have used fertility drugs.
- You have had long term exposure to unidentified environmental contaminants.

Symptoms

Cancer experts have identified a set of health problems that may be symptoms of ovarian cancer (*NY Times June 13, 2007 Symptoms Found for Early Check on Ovary Cancer*). This new advice is the first official recognition that ovarian cancer, long believed to give no warning until far advanced, causes symptoms at an earlier stage in many women.

The symptoms to watch out for are:

- **bloating,**
- **pelvic or abdominal pain,**
- **difficulty eating, feeling full quickly,**
- **a change in bowel movements,**
- **a frequent or urgent need to urinate.**

If you have any of these problems, nearly every day for more than two or three weeks, see a gynecologist, especially if the symptoms are new and quite different from your usual state of health.

On a personal note, I had at least three of these symptoms in the 6 months prior to my diagnosis, but who would think that bloating and gas was ovarian cancer!! Now you need to at least consider that possibility.

Even if you don't have the symptoms, but can answer "yes" to at least two of the risk factors, ask your PCP for a CA-125 test at your annual physical (covered by most insurance). CA-125 is a protein produced by most ovarian tumor cells. Anything under 30 is considered normal but there are false positives, so **don't panic** if yours is elevated. It should just be re-checked in a few months, similar to smear test uncertainties, or followed up by an ultrasound.

*In March '06, my CA-125 was 17. I asked for the test because I had been suffering from low estrogen since the birth of my twins and knew it was a risk factor. I also knew that bloating etc. were possible signs but felt "safe" because of the March test results. When a bladder infection, that wasn't cleared by antibiotics, sent me to the doctor in November, I was diagnosed with advanced stage ovarian cancer. My CA-125 was 4600!. **Even a few months can make a huge difference.***

So I urge you to be aware and SHOUT OUT THIS MESSAGE to every women you know.

MAKE OVARIAN CANCER A KNOWN THREAT NOT A SILENT KILLER!

This information has been validated by Dr Carolyn Muller of UNMH and the Cancer Institute of NM. It has been specifically prepared for pre-menopausal Moms. More detailed information for older women can be found on any of the web-sites mentioned.

You are welcome to contact me at Kay@OvarianCancerTogether.org or Tel. (505) 603 7878.

