

Understanding Your Ovarian Cancer Treatment

Dealing with an ovarian cancer diagnosis can be an overwhelming and confusing time. This handout will help you understand the types of treatment available and important things to keep in mind as you move forward.

*Ovarian cancer is usually treated with a combination of **surgery** and **chemotherapy**.*

Surgery: Doctors remove cancer tissue in an operation

Chemotherapy: Using special medicines to shrink tumors or kill cancer cells

Your doctor may recommend **SURGERY** to find out how far the cancer has spread and to remove all or as much of the cancer as possible. This is called debulking. **Surgery is often the first step in treating ovarian cancer and it should be performed by a specialist called a gynecologic oncologist.**

The type of surgery you have depends on how far your cancer has spread and on your general health. For women of childbearing age who have certain kinds of tumors and whose cancer is in the earliest stage, it may be possible to treat the disease without taking away the ability to have children.

You may be treated with **CHEMOTHERAPY** (often referred to as "chemo") in a doctor's office or the hospital. Chemotherapy works by stopping or slowing the growth of cancer cells. In many cases, it is used as a follow-up treatment after surgery. Sometimes chemotherapy is used before surgery with the hope of shrinking a tumor and making it easier to remove.

Chemotherapy for ovarian cancer is often given intravenously. This can be through a vein in your arm or through a port connected to larger veins. A port is a small round disc made of plastic or metal that is placed under your skin in the upper chest, just below the collarbone. This makes it easier to get to your veins throughout your chemotherapy treatment. Another way to deliver chemotherapy is to deliver it into the belly where it can come in direct contact with the cancer cells.

The treatment plan you and your doctor decide on will depend on many things about you:

- Overall health
- Age
- Type and stage of cancer
- Whether you plan to have children
- Personal treatment goals

Talking to Your Doctor

“Tell me more about my treatment.”

Make sure that you understand what to expect from your ovarian cancer treatment. Is this treatment for a cure? If there is no cure, will the treatment make you feel more comfortable or live longer? Everyone’s cancer is unique to them and their personal situation. The more information you have, the better decisions you and your loved ones can make about how you want to move forward with your care. Be sure to talk openly about your concerns with all your medical providers. Let them know what is important to you. For more on talking to your doctor see www.normaleah.org/survivor-resources/newly-diagnosed/ for a [list of questions](#) developed by the NormaLeah Ovarian Cancer Initiative.

“Should I get a second opinion?”

Sometimes women decide to talk to more than one cancer doctor about their diagnosis and treatment. This is called a “second opinion.” A second opinion can give you more information and help you choose the right treatment for you.

“Will there be side effects?”

As you learn more about your treatment, ask your doctor about possible side effects. A side effect is an unhealthy or unpleasant physical or emotional condition caused by your treatment. All treatments for ovarian cancer have side effects. It is hard to predict how your body will respond. Some side effects can be very serious, while others are just unpleasant. Your medical providers can find ways to help you manage these side effects.

“What about clinical trials?”

Another treatment option is taking part in a clinical trial. This is a type of research that studies a treatment in order to determine how safe and helpful it is. Patients participating in clinical trials may have access to new therapy options not available to all women. Talk to your doctor about different clinical trial options and their benefits to see if this is an option for you.

Ask to be Referred to a Gynecologic Oncologist

A gynecologic oncologist is a doctor who has been trained to treat cancers of the female reproductive system. **Surgery done by a gynecologic oncologist has been shown to help patients with ovarian cancer live longer.** The following centers have gynecologic oncologists:

1. University of Iowa Hospital and Clinics.* Call 800-777-8442 or visit <https://uihc.org/appointment>
2. The Iowa Clinic of Des Moines. Call 515-875-9290.
3. University of Nebraska Medical Center.* Call 402-559-5068.
4. Mayo Clinic of Rochester, MN.* Call 507-512-7193 or visit <https://www.mayoclinic.org/forms/us-resident-appointment-form/>
5. Sanford Health, Sioux Falls, SD. Call 605-312-3250.
6. Avera Medical Group, Sioux Falls, SD. Call 605-322-7535.

*NCI-designated Cancer Center. Studies show that treatment at one of these centers may lead to better results.