

The Women's Health Research Program Health Bulletin

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womenshealth.med.monash.edu.au

Screening for Ovarian Cancer

Presently there is no test, or group of tests for ovarian cancer, that has been shown to be effective for screening women living in the community who are free of symptoms.

Undiagnosed ovarian cancer in women who have no symptoms is rare. So, even if there was a good test for diagnosing ovarian cancer, if a lot of women with no symptoms were screened, most of the women who tested positive would not actually have ovarian cancer. They would have what is called a falsely positive test. This would create a problem as the only way to sort out whether a woman with a positive screening test for ovarian cancer does or does not have cancer is for the woman to have surgery. If most women picked up on screening have falsely positive tests and they all have surgery, then a large number of women would be having unnecessary surgery and being exposed to surgical risks when there is actually nothing wrong with them.

There are large studies currently underway to evaluate possible future screening tests for ovarian cancer. These studies have to be very large in order to include enough women who will develop the disease.

They also need to run for a long time in order to assess whether the use of the screening tests actually reduces the risk of dying in the group who are screened. The results of these studies will be available in the next three years.

However in the meantime, even though there is no screening test available, there is something you can do—take notice of your own body—as it says on the NBOCC website:

www.nbocc.org.au/ovarian-cancer/awareness/signs-and-symptoms-of-ovarian-cancer

The commonest symptoms of ovarian cancer are vague:

- abdominal bloating,
- abdominal or back pain,
- loss of appetite or feeling full easily,
- a change to your usual toilet habits,
- unexplained weight loss or gain, and
- indigestion or heartburn.

Only you know your usual patterns or habits and a persistent change of your routine should be reported to your doctor.

There is more information about screening for ovarian cancer on the website of the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre (NBOCC) which can be found here:

www.nbocc.org.au/our-organisation/position-statements/population-screening-and-early-detection*

*This information has been endorsed by organisations including: the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Australian Society Gynaecologic Oncologists, Cancer Council Australia, the Screening Subcommittee of the Department of Health and Ageing, and The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia.

Get involved in research

Antidepressants ruining your Sex Drive?

Are you aged between 35–55 years, have been taking a stable dose of one of SSRIs (sertraline, citalopram, paroxetine, fluoxetine or fluvoxamine) or SNRIs (venlafaxine) for the past three months and are experiencing sexual difficulties and for which you would like to be treated.

If you would like more information, regarding this and other studies please visit our website: womenshealth.med.monash.edu.au or contact the Women's Health Research Program on 03 9903 0820 or by email on womens.health@monash.edu



This is the April addition of our women's health bulletins. These are to give you the latest women's health information and update you on how you can be involved in women's health research.

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