

Ovarian Cancer..

The Silent Killer



Associate Professor A. Ilancheran, Head of Division of Gynaecological Oncology & Senior Consultant, Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology and The Cancer Institute @ NUH, shares some insights on ovarian cancer, which all women should know.

Qs: What is the prevalence of ovarian cancer among women in Singapore?

Ans: Ovarian cancer is the most common gynaecological cancer seen in Singapore and is the fourth most common cancer seen in Singapore women. It can arise from one or both the ovaries.

Qs: Who are at risk of getting this disease?

Ans: As with most cancers, ovarian cancer usually arises from many factors and is most likely due to genetic damage that builds up over time. In a very small percentage of patients, this risk may be inherited. Several other risk factors that may be associated with ovarian cancer include older age, not bearing any children, family history of breast cancer, early onset of menstruation and late menopause.

On the other hand, there are several factors that can reduce the risk of ovarian cancer. These include pregnancy, breast-feeding, use of contraceptive pills and having a hysterectomy.

Qs: What are the symptoms of this disease?

Ans: Often known as the 'silent killer', it is a disease that progresses with no symptoms in its early stages. Most patients are only diagnosed in the advanced stages - Stages 3 and 4. As the disease advances, there may be feeling of bloatedness, indigestion, loss of appetite, increase in the abdominal girth and a general sense of not being well.

Qs: Are there any available screening for ovarian cancer?

Ans: There are currently no effective screening methods available for the early diagnosis of ovarian cancer.

Qs: What are the treatment options?

Ans: Surgery is the main form of treatment. In the early stages, surgery alone may be sufficient. In advanced cases, surgery is usually followed by chemotherapy for six cycles.

Qs: How effective is the treatment?

Ans: The efficacy of treatment depends mainly on the stage of the disease at the point of diagnosis. In stage 1, the cure rate approaches 95%. However, most patients are diagnosed only in stages 3 or 4, where the survival rate is only about 30%, even with surgery and chemotherapy.

For more information on ovarian cancer, please contact:

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