



## “BREAK THE SILENCE” CONVERSATION STARTER

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### Starting a Dialogue with Your Doctor about Ovarian Cancer

Because the signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer can be subtle, it is important to listen to your body and be proactive in talking with your doctor about any concerns. We have developed this “Conversation Starter” to help you open the discussion.

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### When to See Your Doctor

Common ovarian cancer symptoms include pressure or pain in your abdomen or pelvis, swelling, bloating, gastrointestinal upset and/or frequent urination in the absence of an infection. If you are experiencing at least two to three of these symptoms clustered together that persist for two or more weeks, you should see your doctor and ask for a rectovaginal exam, a transvaginal ultrasound and a CA-125 blood test.

If you've already seen a doctor and received a diagnosis other than ovarian cancer, yet your symptoms continue or you are not getting relief from treatment, schedule a follow-up visit with your gynecologist or get a second opinion.

If you have a history of breast, colon and/or ovarian cancer in your family, strongly consider seeing a doctor trained to care for women with ovarian and other gynecologic cancers – a gynecologic oncologist – to talk about the symptoms and regular screenings. If your primary care physician or gynecologist suspects you have ovarian cancer, he or she may refer you to a gynecologic oncologist or ask for a referral yourself.

### 1) General Tips for Optimizing Conversations with Your Doctor

- Write out your questions ahead of time and bring them with you. Conducting online research in advance might help you prepare a more complete list of questions. (Web sites like [www.ovarian.org](http://www.ovarian.org) or [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org) are good ovarian cancer resources.)
- Consider bringing a family member or friend with you. It can help to have another person hear what your doctor says and think of additional questions to ask.
- Take notes during the appointment with your doctor to make sure you understand what you are hearing. Ask for clarification, if necessary.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions or where you can find more information. You have a right to know.
- Be forthcoming and persistent about issues that concern you. Trust your instincts.

## 2) How to Ask Your Doctor about Ovarian Cancer

### **General Questions**

- Given my family and medical history, am I at risk?
- Do you perform/should I have a rectovaginal exam on an annual basis?
- Do you recommend oral contraception as a preventive measure?
- Are there any lifestyle modifications such as diet and exercise that can help prevent ovarian cancer?

### **High-Risk Questions**

- What about an ultrasound examination (ideally, a transvaginal sonography, which is an ultrasound test performed with a small instrument placed in the vagina) or a CA-125 blood test if I am at high risk?
- How often should these tests be performed? Do you perform them or should I see a gynecologic oncologist?
- When do you recommend genetic counseling/testing for ovarian cancer?
- Where can I find additional information about ovarian cancer and support?

## 3) If You Are Experiencing Symptoms

- In addition to the most common symptoms – pressure or pain in your abdomen or pelvis, swelling, bloating, gastrointestinal upset and/or frequent urination in the absence of an infection – women with ovarian cancer also might experience:
  - Persistent indigestion, gas or nausea
  - Unexplained changes in bowel habits, including diarrhea or constipation
  - Loss of appetite
  - Unexplained weight loss or gain
  - Increased abdominal girth or clothes fitting tighter around your waist
  - Pain during intercourse
  - A persistent lack of energy
  - Lower back pain
- Make notes about specific symptoms, including the intensity and frequency so you can report them accurately to your doctor.
- Try to state as clearly as you can any other changes in body functions, from sleep and bowel habits to other changes such as headaches.
- Mention lifestyle habits, even things you may not be proud of, such as smoking. Never hold back information, no matter how trivial you think it may be.

**Talk to your doctor or contact the National Ovarian Cancer Coalition by visiting [www.ovarian.org](http://www.ovarian.org) or calling 1-888-OVARIAN for more information.**