



# Understanding ovarian cancer

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**MARCELLE RUTH**  
CANCER CENTRE & SPECIALIST HOSPITAL

**The Marcelle Ruth Cancer Centre  
& Specialist Hospital is the first  
comprehensive healthcare centre of its  
kind in Nigeria and indeed West Africa.**

**> Our promise**

In everything we do, we believe that compassion and care make all the difference.

With vast experience and understanding, our specialist team uses the very latest technology and treatments to deliver the best outcomes possible.

From screening and diagnosis to treatment and ongoing support, we are committed to providing outstanding care to those in need.

# About this booklet

We understand it can be overwhelming for anyone to undergo cancer care, but we are here to provide you with help and support.

The focus of this leaflet is to help you and your family understand more about ovarian cancer.

# Ovarian cancer

Ovarian cancer refers to any cancerous growth that forms in the ovary. The ovary is the part of the female reproductive system which produces eggs. It results in abnormal cells that have the ability to invade or spread to the other parts of the body.

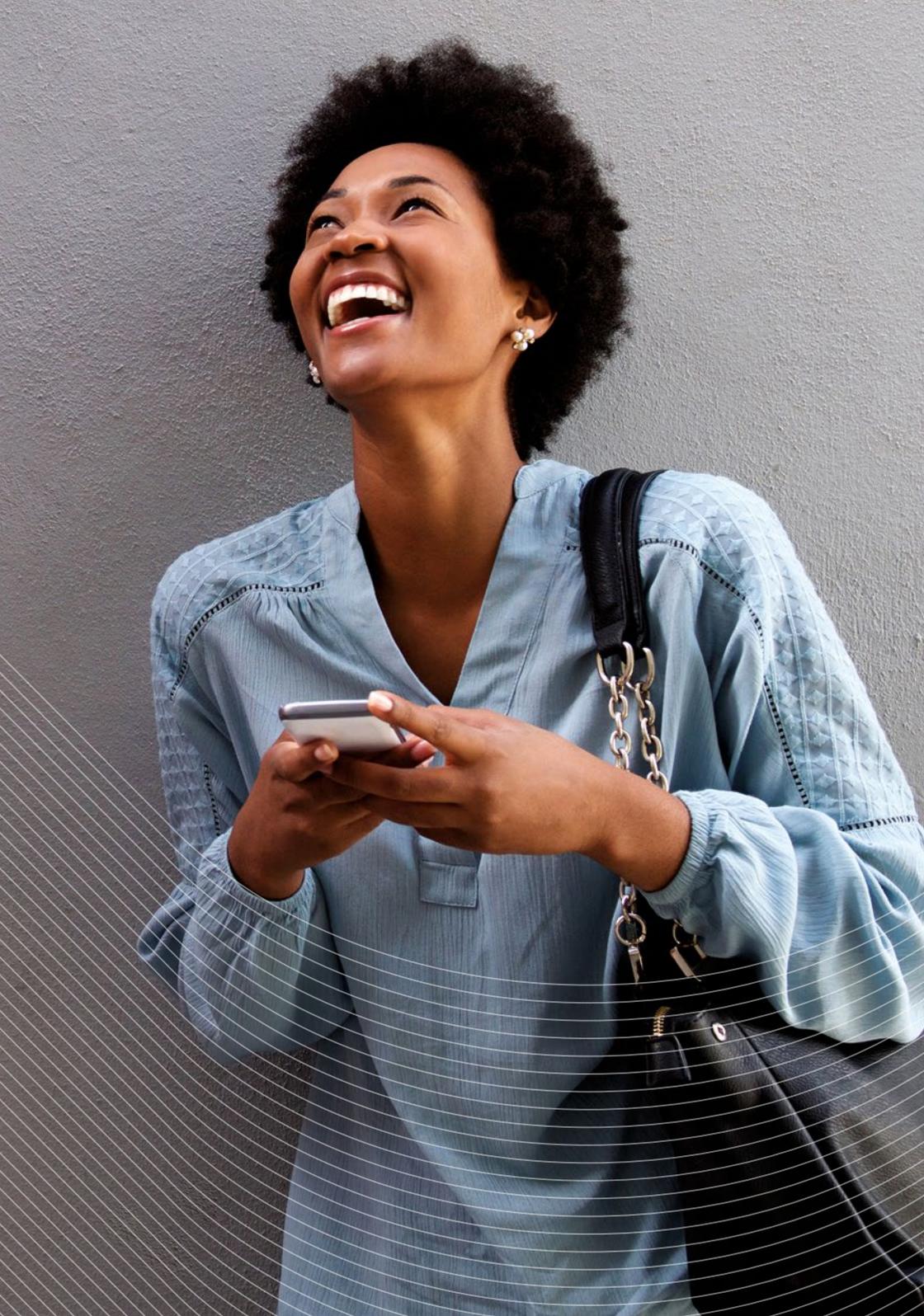
Ovarian cancer is now the fifth most common cause of cancer-related death in the U.S.A. and is the leading cause of death from gynaecological cancers. In Nigeria, ovarian cancer is the sixth commonest cancer in women. It is common in the post-menopausal group.

## Signs and symptoms

- Bloating
- Abdominal or pelvic pain
- Back pain
- Unexpected vaginal bleeding
- Pain and bleeding during sexual intercourse
- Feeling full rapidly when eating
- Changes in bowel habits such as constipation
- Urinary symptoms such as frequent urination and urgent urination
- Others: fatigue, indigestion, diarrhoea, weight loss, breathlessness

## Risk factors

- Increasing age
- Positive family history
- Nulliparity (never having been pregnant)
- Early menses and late menopause
- Obesity
- Hormone replacement therapy
- Previous history of breast cancer, ovarian or bowel cancer



## Protective factors

- Childbearing
- Breastfeeding
- Early menopause
- The oral contraceptive pill

## Diagnosis/screening

If routine screening or symptoms suggest that a person may have ovarian cancer, a doctor will typically:

- ask the person about their personal and family medical history
- carry out a pelvic examination.

They may also recommend:

### Blood tests

These tests will check for high levels of a tumour marker called CA-125.

### Imaging tests

Examples include a transvaginal ultrasound, an MRI scan or a CT scan.

### Laparoscopy

A healthcare professional will insert a thin tube with a camera attached through a small hole in the abdomen, to see the ovaries and perhaps take a tissue sample for a biopsy.

### Biopsy

This involves the microscopic examination of a tissue sample.

Only a biopsy can confirm that a person has cancer.



## Staging

If a healthcare professional diagnoses ovarian cancer, they will need to determine the stage and grade to decide on a treatment plan.

The stage refers to how far the cancer has spread. For example:

### Localised

Cancer cells affect only the ovaries or fallopian tubes and have not spread elsewhere.

### Regional

Cancer has spread to nearby organs, such as the uterus.

### Distant

Cancer is present elsewhere in the body. It now affects other organs, such as the lungs or liver.

The grade, meanwhile, refers to how abnormal the cancer cells appear. Getting an early diagnosis usually means that treatment can be more effective. However, other factors can affect this.

These factors include the person's age and overall health and the type or grade of the cancer cell, as some types are more aggressive than others.

## Treatment

Treatment will depend on many factors, including:

- the type, stage, and grade of the cancer
- the individual's age and overall health
- their personal preferences
- accessibility and affordability of treatment.

The main treatments are:

### Surgery

To remove as much of the cancer as possible – this will often involve removing both ovaries, womb and the fallopian tubes.

### Chemotherapy

This is used after the surgery to kill any remaining cancer cells but is occasionally before surgery to shrink the cancer.

The aim of treatment is to cure the cancer whenever possible. If the cancer has spread too far to be cured, the aim is to relieve symptoms and control the cancer for as long as possible.

Others include: immunotherapy, targeted therapy and radiotherapy (for palliative purpose).

### Outcome after treatment

The earlier ovarian cancer is diagnosed and treated, the better the chance of a cure.

But often it's not recognised until it's already spread and a cure is not possible.

Even after successful treatment, there's a high chance the cancer will come back within the next few years.

If it does come back, it cannot usually be cured. But chemotherapy may help reduce the symptoms and keep the cancer under control for several months or years.

Overall, around half of women with ovarian cancer will live for at least five years after diagnosis, and about one in three will live at least 10 years.





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