

# Testing for Ovarian Cancer

## Are there tests that can find ovarian cancer early?

Screening is when a test is used to look for a disease before there are any symptoms. Cancer screening tests work when they can find disease early, when treatment works best. Diagnostic tests are used when a person has symptoms. The purpose of diagnostic tests is to find out, or diagnose, what is causing the symptoms. Diagnostic tests also may be used to check a person who is considered at high risk for cancer.

There is no simple and reliable way to test for ovarian cancer in women who do not have any signs or symptoms. The Pap test does not screen for ovarian cancer. The only cancer the Pap test screens for is cervical cancer. However, here are steps you can take:

- Pay attention to your body, and know what is normal for you.
- If you notice any changes in your body that are not normal for you and could be a sign of ovarian cancer, talk to your doctor and ask about possible causes, such as ovarian cancer.
- Ask your doctor if you should have a test, such as a rectovaginal pelvic exam, a transvaginal ultrasound, or a CA-125 blood test if:
  - You have any unexplained signs or symptoms of ovarian cancer. These tests sometimes help find or rule out ovarian cancer.
  - You have had breast, uterine, or colorectal cancer; or a close relative has had ovarian cancer.

### CA-125 blood test:

The CA-125 blood test is a screening method that looks for a protein called CA-125, which is higher in women with ovarian cancer and some other conditions, such as non-gynecological cancers, and endometriosis. Since CA-125 can be associated with many different health conditions, it is not useful for determining ovarian cancer.

### Transvaginal ultrasonography:

This type of ultrasound (sound waves) makes a picture of the uterus, ovaries and cervix. It can be used to detect small masses. Unfortunately, by the time the tumor in the ovaries is big enough to be detected, the cancer has already progressed to the later stages.

### Pelvic examination:

A pelvic exam is a physical exam a doctor does to check for problems or abnormalities in a woman's female reproductive organs. Sometimes the doctor will combine a pelvic exam, which involves touching and lightly pressing on the lower abdomen, with a rectovaginal exam, in which the doctor inserts one finger into the vagina and another into the rectum while placing the other hand on top of the pelvis. This allows the doctor to feel for abnormal growths or lesions. These exams help detect tumors and other abnormalities in later stages of the disease.

