

Glossary of medical terms

Abdominal cavity	The cavity of the body between the diaphragm and pelvis, containing the abdominal organs.
Acupuncture	Acupuncture is a complementary therapy that typically involves puncturing the skin with needles in defined points to relieve the symptoms of certain conditions, such as pain.
Anaemia	A lower than normal concentration of haemoglobin in the blood, due to a low red blood cell count and/or less than normal haemoglobin content in each red blood cell. Symptoms include general weakness, shortness of breath and pallor.
Aromatherapy	Aromatherapy is a complementary therapy that is based on the use of concentrated plant essences. Aromatherapy is used to reduce the symptoms of a range of conditions and aims to improve both physical and emotional wellbeing.
Ascites	Excess fluid in the space between the membrane lining the abdomen and abdominal organs.
Bleomycin, etoposide, cisplatin (BEP)	A combination of drugs used in chemotherapy.
Blood cells, blood count	Blood is composed of red and white blood cells and platelets. A blood count is a test that gives information about the cells in a patient's blood.
Blood clotting agents	These are substances that cause the blood to clot during wound healing.
Bone marrow	The flexible tissue found in the interior of bones. Red blood cells are produced in the heads of long bones, in a process known as haematopoiesis.
BRCA1/2	All of us have the <i>BRCA1/2</i> genes but a mutation increases the risk of developing ovarian cancer from one in 54 to one in two. Such mutations often run in families.
CA125 blood test	CA125 is a protein which is often found to be at high levels in the bloodstream in women with ovarian cancer. It is used to diagnose and follow up ovarian tumours before and after treatment.
Carboplatin	A drug used in chemotherapy.

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Catheter	A tube inserted into the bladder, allowing urine to flow through it and into a drainage bag. Short-term catheterisation may be needed to remove urine from the bladder for a short period of time if there is something stopping you emptying your bladder in the normal way. Short-term catheterisation may be used in preparation for some types of surgery, such as operations on the womb or ovaries.
Chemotherapy	Chemotherapy is a treatment of cancer with anticancer drugs. Its main purpose is to kill cancer cells. Traditional chemotherapeutic agents act by killing cells that divide rapidly, one of the main properties of most cancer cells. This means that chemotherapy also harms cells that divide rapidly under normal circumstances: cells in the bone marrow, digestive tract and hair follicles. This results in the most common side effects of chemotherapy: decreased production of blood cells, inflammation of the lining of the digestive tract and hair loss.
Clinical trial	All new drugs undergo clinical trials before approval. Clinical trials are carefully conducted tests in which effectiveness and side effects are studied.
Complementary	These are various treatments used alongside chemotherapy (not in place of it). These may relieve the symptoms of the disease and the side effects of treatment.
CT scan	The CT (computed tomography) scan examines a specific area of the body by gathering information with a sweeping beam of radiation that acts as a sensor. Computer analysis of a series of cross-sectional scans made along a single axis of a bodily structure or tissue is used to construct a three-dimensional image of that structure.
Fallopian tubes	The narrow ducts leading from a woman's ovaries to the uterus.
Fertility sparing Surgery	Some surgery is possible that enables a patient still to have children. The key factor in fertility sparing surgery is how advanced the cancer is, which is often not known until the surgery. It is important to discuss your wishes and options fully with your oncologist prior to surgery.
Gene	A building block of inheritance, which contains the instructions for the production of a particular protein, and is made up of a molecular sequence found on a section of DNA. Each gene is found on a precise location on a chromosome.
Homeopathic	Homeopathic preparations are tailored to the symptoms and the patient, rather than to the illness, so patients with the same illness but different symptoms will be treated with different remedies. Using extremely small doses of plant and mineral extracts (a 'microdose'); the remedies are given in sugar-based tablets that are taken by melting under the tongue.

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Hormone therapy	In the treatment of some ovarian cancers, hormone therapy uses drugs to block the production of oestrogen or inhibit its activity.
Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)	Also called oestrogen replacement therapy, this treatment is used to relieve the discomforts of menopause. Oestrogen and another female hormone, progesterone, are usually taken together to replace the oestrogen no longer made by the body.
Hysterectomy	The surgical removal of the uterus.
Intraperitoneal chemotherapy	The peritoneal cavity is a potential space between the two membranes that separates the organs in the abdominal cavity from the abdominal wall. Intraperitoneal chemotherapy delivers treatment directly into the abdomen.
IVF	In vitro fertilisation is a process by which an egg is fertilised by sperm outside the body. IVF is a major treatment for infertility.
Lymph nodes	Small, bean-shaped masses of tissue scattered along the lymphatic system that act as filters and immune monitors, removing fluids, bacteria, or cancer cells that travel through the lymph system.
Malignant potential	This gives an idea of how cancerous a tumour is. For example, a tumour of low malignant potential is unlikely to spread and is referred to as a borderline tumour.
Massage therapy	Massage is one of the oldest, simplest forms of therapy and is a system of stroking, pressing and kneading different areas of the body to relieve pain, relax, stimulate and tone the body.
Menopause	This is the time in a woman's life when her monthly period stops. Women who have their ovaries removed go immediately into full menopause. This causes the end of monthly periods and associated hormonal changes.
Oestrogen	Primary female sex hormone, produced by the ovaries.
Omentum	The fatty tissue from the upper part of the abdominal cavity near the stomach and intestines.
Oophorectomy	The surgical removal of an ovary or ovaries. The removal of an ovary together with the fallopian tube is called salpingo-oophorectomy.
Ovarian epithelial tumours	These originate on the surface of the ovary. Malignant epithelial ovarian tumours are the most common type of cancerous ovarian tumour, accounting for 90% of all cases.

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Ovarian germ cell tumours	These originate in the cells within the ovary that develop into eggs. These types of tumours account for 5-10% of ovarian cancer cases and tend to occur in younger women.
Ovarian sex cord-stromal tumours	These begin in the connective cells that hold the ovaries together. These tumours account for 5% of ovarian cancer cases and can affect all age groups.
Paclitaxel	A drug used in chemotherapy.
Placebo	A substance that has no medicinal effect, used as a control in testing new drugs.
Platelets	These are cell fragments found in the blood and they play a role in blood clotting.
Platinum resistant	Cancer cells that are unresponsive to platinum based chemotherapy.
Platinum sensitive	Cancer cells that respond to platinum based chemotherapy.
Psychological therapies	Psychological therapies generally fall into three categories. These are behavioural therapies, which focus on cognitions (the development of one's thoughts) and behaviours, psychoanalytical and psychodynamic therapies, which focus on the unconscious relationship patterns that evolved from childhood, and humanistic therapies, which focus on self-development in the 'here and now'.
Radiotherapy	The treatment of cancer or other disease using X-rays or similar radiation.
Reflexology	Reflexology is a system of complementary medicine that maps out the reflexes on the feet and hands to different areas of the body. It involves applying acupressure and massage-like techniques to these reflex points on the feet and hands.
Remission	No evidence of disease after treatment has been completed.
Salpingectomy	The surgical removal of a fallopian tube.
Stage 1-4	There are four recognised stages of ovarian cancer that give an indication of the location of the cancer. For example in stage 1 the cancer is confined within one or both ovaries and in stage 2 the cancer is found in the ovary as well as other pelvic structures like the uterus. Please see our guide 'Ovarian cancer – what you need to know' for further details.
Tamoxifen	A hormone therapy commonly used in the treatment of breast cancer. It can be used to treat some types of ovarian cancer.

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Targeted therapy	A type of medication that blocks the growth of cancer cells by interfering with specific targeted molecules needed for cancer creation and tumour growth, rather than by simply interfering with all rapidly dividing cells (such as with traditional chemotherapy).
Topical	This is anything that is applied to body surfaces such as the skin. Topical substances are usually creams, foams, gels, lotions and ointments.
Ultrasound	The use of ultrasonic waves to visualize an internal body structure, for diagnostic purposes.
Transabdominal ultrasound	A small handheld instrument called a transducer is passed back and forth over the pelvic area to provide images of the abdomen.
Transvaginal ultrasound	The hand-held device that produces the ultrasound waves is inserted directly into the vagina, close to the pelvic structures, thus often producing a clearer and less distorted image than obtained through transabdominal ultrasound technology.
Uterus	Commonly known as the womb. The uterus is a muscular, hollow organ of the female reproductive tract. The uterus contains and nourishes the embryo and foetus from the time the fertilized egg is implanted until birth.

Who you may meet on your journey

Consultant	A consultant is a senior doctor who has completed all of his/her specialist training in a particular field of medicine (e.g.: gynaecology) and has been placed on the specialist register in their chosen speciality.
Counsellor	Counsellors help people to explore feelings and emotions that are often related to their experiences. Counsellors work in a confidential setting; they do not give advice but help people make their own choices within an agreed framework.
Genetic Counsellor	A healthcare professional who has been specially trained in the science of human genetics. Genetic counselling provides information and advice about genetic conditions. The counsellor will discuss the risks, benefits and limitations of genetic testing with you and explain the potential implications of results for you and your family.
GP (General Practitioner)	A general practitioner is a specialist trained to work in the front line of a healthcare system and to take the initial steps to provide care for any health problem(s) that patients may have (ref). In some countries GPs are referred to as family doctors or just doctors.
Gynaecological Oncologist	A medical doctor who specialises in treating people with gynaecological cancers (e.g.: ovarian, cervical, uterine cancers).
Gynaecological Surgical Oncologist	(sometimes just referred to as Gynaecological Oncologist) Specialises in the surgical aspects of treating gynaecological cancers (e.g.: ovarian, cervical, uterine cancers). This includes carrying out biopsies and surgically removing cancers, the surrounding tissues and sometimes the nearby lymph nodes.
Gynaecologist	A medical doctor who specialises in disorders of the female genital tract.
Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT).	A MDT is a group of doctors and other health professionals with expertise in a specific cancer who together discuss and manage an individual patient's care. The MDT usually consists of a surgeon, radiologist, pathologist, oncologist and clinical nurse specialist.
Oncologist	An oncologist is a doctor who specialises in treating people with cancer. Usually their focus is on chemotherapy and radiotherapy.
Physiotherapist	Physiotherapists help and treat people with physical problems caused by surgery, illness, accident and aging.
Practice Nurse	Practice nurses work in GP surgeries and are involved in most aspects of patient care such as treating small injuries, helping with minor operations, health screening, family planning, and health promotion.
