

# CHECK OUT YOUR FAMILY MEDICAL HISTORY - IT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE

Submitted by: New You PR

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- New report reveals widespread ignorance on symptoms of ovarian cancer, sparking fears that potentially many women could be living undiagnosed

- Almost two thirds of women with familial history of ovarian and/or breast cancer did not consult a GP after hearing the news

- Three quarters of women mistakenly believe that a smear test checks you for ovarian cancer

- Ovarian cancer fifth most common cancer in women, but less than a third of women would be able to identify any of the symptoms

Recent advances in genetic testing mean that women with a family history of ovarian cancer can save their lives by finding out more about their own risk of developing the disease. However, a recent nationwide survey found that a staggering 63% of women who knew they had a family history of breast and / or ovarian cancer have not consulted their doctor for possible referral to a genetic clinic for counseling and discussion regarding testing.

The survey, conducted by leading charity, <http://ovarian.org.uk> to mark Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month in March, also reported that 20% (of the 63% of women who knew they had a family history of breast and / or ovarian cancer) failed to undertake any further investigation into their family medical history.

Of the 2,000 UK women aged 18+ who were surveyed, over 66% were not aware of the main symptoms associated with ovarian cancer. Of those that were, 30.7% would never visit their doctor if they were experiencing bloating (one of the main symptoms of ovarian cancer) and it would take them two weeks to visit to doctor if they had pelvic / abdominal pain (30.5%).

Whilst it is extremely encouraging to know that 99% of respondents are aware that ovarian cancer exists, a shocking 90% of respondents said they had never asked their doctor for an ovarian cancer test, with over half of them claiming "they didn't know you could be tested for ovarian cancer."

Gilda Witte, CEO of Ovarian Cancer Action explains, "Ovarian cancer is still the most deadly gynaecological cancer - with 7,000 new UK diagnoses each year. Ovarian cancer has long shaken off its title as 'the silent killer'. Experts insist there are symptoms – and both women and health professionals need to be more vigilant in spotting them quickly.

"Most women in the UK are not diagnosed until it has already spread, resulting in poor survival rates. Many doctors mistake ovarian cancer for Irritable Bowel Syndrome – but there is a difference. Ovarian cancer symptoms are frequent and persistent whilst IBS symptoms come and go. What's more, it's important to stress that cervical screening doesn't test for ovarian cancer. 25% of the women surveyed thought they had been tested for ovarian cancer, but actually three quarters of these women claimed this had been carried out using a smear test.

“We are now urging doctors, particularly when dealing with older women, to rule out ovarian cancer first – before considering more minor ailments like gallstones and irritable bowel, as the earlier that you are diagnosed, the better your outcome will be. Women know their bodies and know when something is wrong. If you are suffering from any of the symptoms – whether it’s persistent bloating, pelvic pain or needing to pee more often – don’t wait for it to go away or to get any worse.”

To mark Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month, Ovarian Cancer Action is calling for all women, especially those with a family history of either breast or ovarian cancer to ‘have the conversation’ by checking out their family medical history and, if need be, consult with their GP – it could save their life!

[www.ovarian.org.uk](http://www.ovarian.org.uk)

The four main symptoms of ovarian cancer are:

- Persistent stomach pain
- Persist bloating or increased stomach size
- Difficulty eating or feeling full quickly
- Needing to urinate more frequently

The key features of the symptoms of ovarian cancer are:

- Their persistency - they don’t go away
- Their frequency - they occur on most days
- They are new - they started in the last 12 months
- They are unusual - they are not normal for you

Women with a family history of ovarian and/or breast cancer as well as womb, bowel, stomach, pancreas, biliary and bladder cancer may have an inherited the BRCA gene that increases their risk of developing ovarian cancer by 10-60%.

If found in the early stages, up to 90% of women will survive for more than five years.

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Notes to Editor

20% (one fifth) of interviewees confirmed they had a family history of breast and / or ovarian cancer as part of the survey study by Ovarian Cancer Action.

Ovarian Cancer Action

Ovarian Cancer Action is the UK’s leading ovarian cancer charity, dedicated to improving survival rates for women with ovarian cancer. It funds innovative research into the disease at the Ovarian Cancer Action Research Centre; raises awareness of the symptoms with national awareness campaigns aimed at women and healthcare workers; and gives a voice to those affected by it, acting as an advocate with

policymakers, healthcare professionals and scientists.

Ovarian Cancer Action funds a broad range of research to achieve accurate and early detection of ovarian cancer, more effective treatments as well as preventative measures to combat the disease.

#### Ovarian Cancer Action Research Centre

The charity established the Ovarian Cancer Action Research Centre which is dedicated to defeating ovarian cancer. Its research is focused on developing a better understanding of the disease in order to prevent, diagnose earlier and more accurately, treat more completely and improve length and quality of life of those with the disease.

The Ovarian Cancer Action's Research Centre at London, Hammersmith Hospital, brings together Imperial College Healthcare clinicians and Imperial College London academics. The Centre is led by Professor Hani Gabra, Professor of Molecular Oncology at Imperial College London, and honorary consultant in medical oncology at Imperial College Healthcare.