

# September: Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month <sup>[1]</sup>

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<sup>[2]</sup>



## **Are you listening?**

“If your body says something may be wrong, please listen.”

-[Are you listening? PSA](#), <sup>[3]</sup> CDC

“I listened to my whispers and I’m alright”

-translated from [Susurros del Cáncer de Ovario](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, public service announcement, Susurros del Cáncer de Ovario, Inc.

It isn't difficult to understand when our body is hungry, thirsty, or has a nagging craving for chocolate chunk chocolate ice-cream with chocolate syrup on top. Many women even develop the ability to predict as "that time of the month" approaches, and anyone can tell when they are

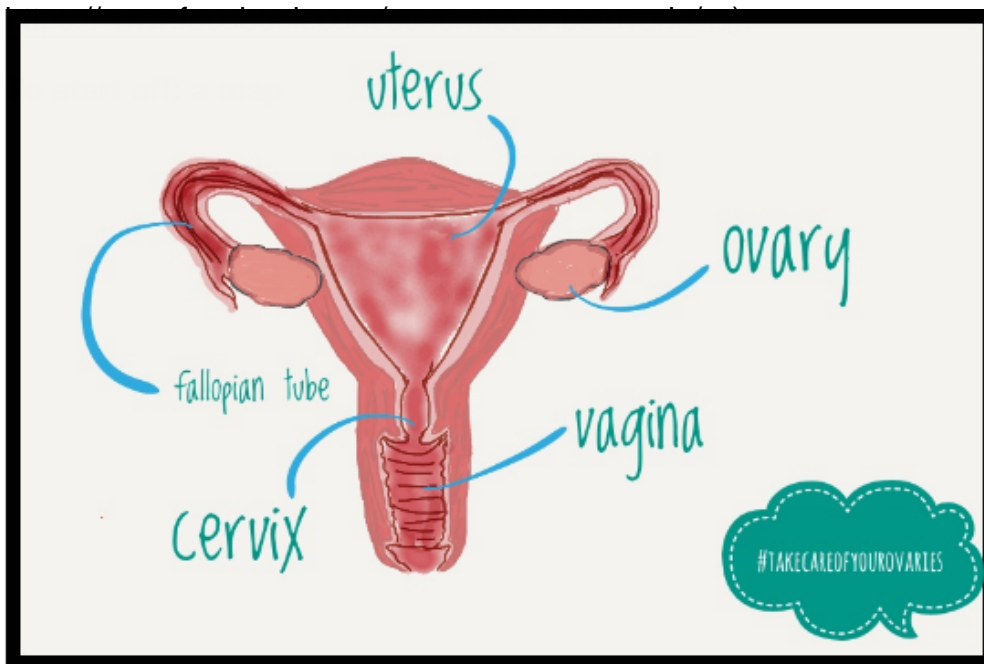
"getting sick". However, we do tend to ignore our bodies when it sends us signals that are slightly more "vague" or ambiguous. Signals such as:

- abdominal or pelvic pain
- difficulty eating or feeling full very quickly
- feeling bloated

Many of us have stumbled upon a cancer diagnosis after a self-diagnostic internet search. Headache: brain tumor. Fatigue: leukemia. Abdominal swelling: pelvic tumor. In most cases there are much simpler answers: migraine, lack of sleep, gases. However, statistics show that 1 in 75 women will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer at some point in their lives. Since the signals described above are common symptoms of ovarian cancer, it's important to take this information into account.

Because September is Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month, we want to share information about this type of cancer that could affect grandmothers, mothers, sisters, daughters, friends, girlfriends and wives. We hope you will share it with your loved ones.

In addition, we invite you to visit the page [Susurros del Cáncer de Ovario, Inc \[5\].](#), a Puerto Rican organization that works to create ovarian cancer awareness, educate the public on the subject, and help defray the costs of patient's treatment. Their page on facebook shares information, videos, news and experiences from survivors, and is especially active during September (



The diagram shows a

simplified version of the female reproductive system. The uterus is in the pelvis, between the bladder and rectum.

## The symptoms:

Not all women present with the same symptoms, and sometimes symptoms of ovarian cancer even go unnoticed. It is therefore important to pay attention to those that are the most common:

- pelvic (below the stomach and between the hips) or abdominal pain
- difficulty eating or feeling full very quickly
- feelings of abdominal swelling (feeling bloated)
- changes in bathroom habits (increase in urinary frequency or urge to urinate, constipation, or diarrhea)
- menstrual changes, vaginal bleeding or discharge (that which is not normal for you)
- fatigue
- nausea or reflux
- back pain

The CDC recommends that you visit your gynecologist if you have any of these symptoms for two weeks or more, or if you have bleeding that is not normal for you. They even provide a sheet you can print out and to document your symptoms. It includes signs of ovarian cancer as well as those for other gynecological cancers. You can get the link to the pdf [here](#) [6].

**SYMPTOMS**

	Cervical Cancer	Ovarian Cancer	Uterine Cancer	Vaginal Cancer	Vulvar Cancer
Abnormal vaginal bleeding or discharge	●	○	○	○	○
Feeling full too quickly or difficulty eating	○	●	○	○	○
Pelvic pain or pressure	○	●	○	○	○
More frequent or urgent need to urinate and/or constipation	○	●	○	○	○
Bloating	○	●	○	○	○
Abdominal or back pain	○	●	○	○	○
Itching, burning, pain, or tenderness of the vulva	○	○	○	○	●
Changes in vulva color or skin, such as a rash, sores, or warts	○	○	○	○	●

**WEEK ONE**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

**WEEK TWO**

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
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**GYNECOLOGIC CANCER SYMPTOMS**

**Gynecologic Cancer Symptoms Diary**

Gynecologic cancers are cancers that start in a woman's reproductive organs and include cervical, ovarian, uterine, vaginal, and vulvar cancers.

Each has different signs, symptoms, and risk factors. And signs and symptoms are not the same for everybody.

**What can you do?**

Pay attention to your body and know what is normal for you.

If you have any of the symptoms listed on the other side of this card for two weeks or longer, or if you have bleeding that is not normal for you, see a doctor.

**When gynecologic cancers are found early, treatment is most effective.**

**Inside Knowledge**  
Get the Facts About Gynecologic Cancer

For more information about gynecologic cancer, please visit [www.cdc.gov/cancer/knowledge](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/knowledge).

Or call 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)

**CDC**

CDC Publication #22-0534, August 2016

## Why should you be aware?

- If found and treated early, the survival rate of 5 years is 90%. If not, the survival rate of 5 years decreases to about 28%
- Only 20% of cases are diagnosed in early stages.

- In Puerto Rico, ovarian cancer ranks ninth in diagnoses among all cancers and has the highest mortality rate among gynecologic cancers.
- According to the CDC, in 2013, Hispanic women had one of the highest incidence rates of ovarian cancer, exceeded only by Caucasian women, and followed in order from highest to lowest prevalence by Asian / Pacific Island Natives, African American, and American Indian / Alaska natives.

## Who is at risk?

Anyone with ovaries is. However, factors that increase the risk for developing ovarian cancer includes:

- Age - risk increases as you age, although it can still affect younger women.
- Family history - mother, sister, aunt or grandmother who have had ovarian cancer. If several family members were diagnosed with breast or ovarian cancer at an early age, the likelihood that it is associated to an inherited genetic mutation increases.
- Having a genetic mutation called BRCA1 or BRCA2 <sup>[7]</sup> or a genetic mutation associated with Lynch syndrome. <sup>[8]</sup>
- Having had breast, uterine cancer, colorectal, or cervical cancer, or melanoma.
- Being of Eastern European Jewish (Ashkenazi) descent.
- Not having children or having difficulty getting pregnant.
- Having endometriosis (a condition in which the tissue that lines the uterus grows in other parts of the body).

## Are there any screening tests available?

Sadly, there are no routine screening tests to aid in finding ovarian cancer before a woman presents signs and symptoms. It is important to understand that though the **Papanicolaou**, or Pap smear, is an excellent screening test for cervical cancer, it **does not detect ovarian cancer**.

## What can I do?

Having any of the risk factors discussed or finding yourself with some of these symptoms for more than two weeks, does not mean you have cancer, but it makes it incredibly important to consult your doctor as soon as possible. Through a physical exam, blood tests, and imaging, you can both reach a diagnosis and an adequate treatment plan. If you have a significant family history, your doctor might suggest that a genetic consult or a prophylactic surgery would be of benefit. It is important to schedule those routine visits to your gynecologist, and most of all, that you communicate any doubts, worries, or changes. If something is troubling you, don't keep it to yourself.

In addition, you can help raise awareness. During the month of September, the teal ribbon, symbol for ovarian cancer, is shared through social media sites along the hashtags **#30daysofteal** **#cuidatusovarios** **#takecareofyourovaries**.

In Puerto Rico, the organization Susurros del Cáncer de Ovario (Whispers of Ovarian Cancer), invites us to be a part of their awareness campaign through [Facebook](#) [5].

They proposed two different initiatives through the month of September:

1. #Tealtuesdays : They invite us to dress in teal and share a picture on their page, and other social media sites.
2. Send a picture to their facebook page blowing bubbles (a representation of whispering, and a sign with the hashtag #takecareofyourovaries. They are also using #30daysofteal and #cuidatusovarios.

Let's reduce deaths from ovarian cancer. Join our efforts!

### **CDC fact sheets:**

[http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/ovarian/pdf/ovarian\\_facts.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/ovarian/pdf/ovarian_facts.pdf) [9]

Web sites with more information:

The CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/ovarian/index.htm> [10]

National Ovarian Cancer Coalition: <http://www.ovarian.org/index.php> [11]

Statistics were obtained from:

<http://www.ovarian.org/about-ovarian-cancer/what-is-ovarian-cancer> [12]

<http://www.cdc.gov/spanish/cancer/ovarian/statistics/race.htm> [13]

<http://www.estadisticas.gobierno.pr/iepr/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=N7h0ekUBEfA%3D&tabid=186>

[14]

<http://www.salud.gov.pr/Estadisticas-Registros-y-Publicaciones/Publicaciones/Informe%20de%20enfermedades%20crónicas%20en%20Puerto%20Rico%20>

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**Source URL:** <https://www.cienciapr.org/en/blogs/conocimiento-tu-salud/september-ovarian-cancer-awareness-month?language=es>

### **Links**

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