

Screening for Ovarian Cancer

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) has issued a final recommendation on *Screening for Ovarian Cancer*.

This recommendation is for adult women. It does not apply to women who are at increased risk for ovarian cancer because of genetic mutations (changes). This recommendation also does not apply to women who are already being treated for ovarian cancer.

The Task Force reviewed recent research studies on screening for ovarian cancer. The recommendation summarizes what it learned: Routine screening for ovarian cancer has no proven benefit and may lead to important harms.

This fact sheet explains the recommendation and what it might mean for you.

What is
ovarian cancer?

Ovarian cancer is cancer that occurs in the ovary. Women have two ovaries—one on either side of the uterus (womb). The ovaries produce, store, and release a woman's eggs.

Screening for Ovarian Cancer

Ovarian cancer is not a common cancer, and it is hard to detect. Many women with this cancer do not show signs or symptoms in the early stages. As a result, ovarian cancer is often diagnosed at a late stage, when it is harder to treat successfully.

Several tests may be used to screen for ovarian cancer:

- **Ultrasound.** This test uses sound waves to “see” structures inside the body. A device aims sound waves at the organs inside the pelvic area, and a computer creates a picture from the echoes of the sound waves bouncing off the organs. This picture can show the doctor if either ovary looks abnormal. If something abnormal is seen, further testing is often needed using surgery.
- **CA-125 blood test.** This test looks for CA-125, a substance that can be found in high amounts in women with ovarian cancer. However, a high CA-125 level does not always mean a woman has ovarian cancer. High levels of this substance also can be found in people with many other conditions, including pregnancy and liver problems.

Potential Benefits and Harms

The Task Force examined the evidence to see if screening all women for ovarian cancer would be helpful. The main benefit of a cancer screening test is to reduce deaths due to the disease. Unfortunately, no current method of screening for ovarian cancer has been shown to reduce deaths.

Screening all women for ovarian cancer also has important potential harms. Results from the screening test often suggest that ovarian cancer may be present when, in fact, there is no cancer. This is called a “false-positive” result. Because surgery is needed to confirm the diagnosis, false-positive results from ovarian cancer screening cause many women to have unnecessary surgery. This surgery may lead to the removal of a healthy ovary. Any surgery, including this one, also can cause harms such as infections or blood clots.

The Task Force Recommendation on Screening for Ovarian Cancer: What Does It Mean?

Here is the recommendation on screening for ovarian cancer. The recommendation has a letter grade. The grade is based on the quality and strength of the evidence about the potential benefits and harms of the screening test. It also is based on the size of the potential benefits and harms. Task Force evidence grades are explained in the box at the end of this fact sheet.

When the Task Force recommends against a screening (Grade D), it is because the screening has more potential harms than potential benefits. The Note next to the recommendation helps to explain key ideas.

Visit the Task Force Web site to read the [full recommendation statement](#) on screening for ovarian cancer. The statement explains the evidence that the Task Force reviewed and how it decided on the grade. An [evidence report](#) and a [2012 update to the report](#) provide more detail about the studies the Task Force considered for this topic.

1 The Task Force recommends against **screening** women for ovarian cancer. **Grade D**

Notes

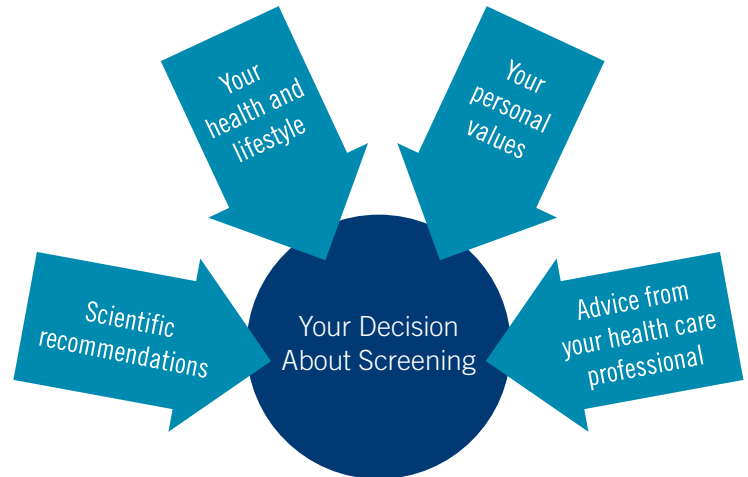
- 1 screening**
Testing all women for ovarian cancer with ultrasound or a CA-125 blood test has no proven benefit, and it may lead to important harms.

Should You Be Screened for Ovarian Cancer?

Getting the best health care means making smart decisions about what screening tests, counseling services, and preventive medicines to get and when to get them. Many people don't get the tests or counseling they need. Others get tests or counseling they don't need or that may be harmful to them.

Task Force recommendations can help you learn about screening tests, counseling services, and preventive medicines. These services can keep you healthy and prevent disease. The Task Force recommendations do not cover diagnosis (tests to find out why you are sick) or treatment of disease. Task Force recommendations also apply to some groups of people, but not others. For example, this recommendation does not apply to women who are at increased genetic risk for ovarian cancer or who are already being treated for ovarian cancer.

How should you decide whether to be screened for ovarian cancer? Consider your own health and lifestyle. Think about your personal beliefs and preferences for health care. Talk with your health care professional about your risk factors for ovarian cancer. And consider scientific recommendations, like this one from the Task Force. If you do get a screening test, talk with your health care professional about the results of your test and next steps you may need to take.





What is the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force?

The Task Force is an independent group of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, or preventive medicines. The recommendations apply to people with no signs or symptoms of the disease being discussed. Recommendations only address services offered in the primary care setting or services referred by a primary care clinician.

To develop a recommendation statement, Task Force members consider the best available science and research on a topic. For each topic, the Task Force posts draft documents for public comment, including a draft recommendation statement. All comments are reviewed and considered in developing the **final recommendation statement**. To learn more, visit the [Task Force Web site](#).

[Click Here to Learn More About Ovarian Cancer and What Happens During Screening Tests](#)

-  [Ovarian Cancer \(Medline Plus\)](#)
-  [Ovarian Cancer Screening \(PDQ®\) \(National Cancer Institute\)](#)

USPSTF Recommendation Grades

Grade	Definition
A	Recommended.
B	Recommended.
C	Recommendation depends on the patient's situation.
D	Not recommended.
I statement	There is not enough evidence to make a recommendation.