Can Ovarian Cancer Cause Anemia?

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Ovarian Cancer and Anemia

You will need to keep a close eye on symptoms of anemia if you are being treated for ovarian cancer especially if you're being treated with chemotherapy. Chemotherapy targets fast dividing cells in your body like cancer cells.

Your body has normal cells that divide rapidly as well and chemo will destroy them. This includes your bone marrow, which is responsible for producing red blood cells. Red blood cells contain hemoglobin, which oxygen binds to so that it can be delivered throughout the body.

Without oxygen, you will become:

- Fatigued
- Breathless
- Depressed
- Less interested in sex
- Pale

You will have a rapid heartbeat, headache, inability to concentrate, and chest pain. Your cognitive functioning will become impaired. If you have a severe case of anemia, you will need to have blood transfusions, so that you have a sufficient supply of red blood cells.

This can be a problem, because your cancer treatment may be delayed. Obviously, you do not want cancer treatment to be hampered, so measures to prevent anemia is highly encouraged. There are ways to keep on top of this issue and continue cancer treatment as needed.

How Can Anemia Be Treated?

If you do end up with anemia, there are treatments available to resolve anemia. First of all, the cause of your anemia will influence the way it is treated. The goal is to get the hemoglobin to an adequate level, so that your anemic symptoms go away.

If you have a certain type of anemia that responds to dietary changes, you will be able to do much of the treatment from home. For instance, you would just eat a diet that is rich in iron. Foods that are rich in iron include:

- Raisins
- Dark green, leafy vegetables
- Prunes
- Dried apricots
- Sweet potatoes
- Beans

- Various seeds
- Enriched breads

Additional Anemia Treatment Methods

- You may also be asked to take an iron supplement to help bring your hemoglobin levels up. Folic acid is another supplement that may be prescribed.
- Some people need to have vitamin B12 injections if they have pernicious anemia. This anemia is caused by an insufficiency of the intrinsic factor in the stomach. In some cases, it may need to be transfused in the blood by IV.
- Delaying the cancer treatment may be advised until the anemia has resolved.
- Do something different with the cancer treatment. If chemo is causing the anemia to go out of control, another treatment may suffice until the anemia is taken care of.

Ovarian Cancer and Anemia The Bottom Line...

The best option for patients who need their hemoglobin levels up quickly will be a blood transfusion. There are many medications to help raise them but they take much longer to take care of the anemia. Your doctor will know the appropriate treatment that will be right for your situation.

Ensuring your diet is rich in iron will help prevent potential anemia brought on by your cancer treatment in some cases. If you still end up anemic, it may warrant more aggressive means to cure your anemia, such as a blood transfusion or vitamin B12.