The Issue No One Talks About: Ovarian Cancer Back Pain

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What Causes Ovarian Cancer Back Pain?

Unfortunately, cancer can cause a lot of crazy symptoms. You may think that because your cancer is in a certain area of your body, your symptoms will “stay” in that area, but that may not always be the case.

For example, if you have ovarian cancer, your cancer is obviously in the pelvic region of your body.

Typically, you’d attribute symptoms of ovarian cancer be all localized to that pelvic region. However, it is fairly common to have lower back pain – and it is a commonly ignored symptom!

We’ll discuss the common symptoms of ovarian cancer, and then we’ll explain ovarian cancer back pain in greater detail – what causes it? And what can you do to make your back pain feel better if you have ovarian cancer?

Common Ovarian Cancer Symptoms

Ovarian cancer may be “silent” in its earliest stages – meaning that it may have no symptoms at all. Once symptoms do present, they tend to be vague – so vague that they can be confused with premenstrual syndrome, a minor bladder issue, or irritable bowel syndrome.

However, the difference between these conditions and ovarian cancer is the persistence of symptoms – these conditions either do not last or are not consistent, whereas ovarian cancer will cause symptoms that are consistent.

Early symptoms of ovarian cancer include:

- Generalized pain of the pelvic region, as well as the lower stomach and lower side of the body
- Lower back pain
- Indigestion or heartburn
- Changes in bowel habits
- Pain during intercourse
- More frequent urination
- Feeling full quickly when eating

As cancer progresses and worsens, the symptoms become more severe as well:

- Loss of appetite
- Tiredness
- Breathlessness
- Weight loss

- Nausea

Does Ovarian Cancer Cause Back Pain

The back pain that you are experiencing is most likely a result of the tumor itself!

According to the Cancer Treatment Centers of America, a pelvic mass (regardless of its malignancy) can exert pressure in the pelvic region. Depending on the size of the mass, it can cause pressure and/or pain in both the pelvic region and the lower back, as well as the upper thighs!

Not only that, but the tumor can increase the size of your abdomen – this is called distension. When your abdomen becomes bigger than your body is used to, it can cause generalized pain – and one of those areas could be your back.

Cancer pain is multifaceted. The pain may come from the cancer itself, or it can be caused by the growth of the cancer as the tumor grows into surrounding tissues. According to Mayo Clinic, some tumors also release certain chemicals – our bodies react to these chemicals can cause pain.

Also, pain can be caused by the treatment of cancer, such as surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy.

How to Manage Back Pain Caused By Ovarian Cancer

Treating cancer pain can be no easy feat. It is recommended that you follow recommendations as discussed by your oncologist to manage your pain.

One way to treat the pain caused by cancer is to remove the source of the pain or minimize the source. This can be done by surgery, chemotherapy, or radiation, for example. Keep in mind, as discussed, that the treatment of pain can also cause pain during the process.

Sometimes, the tumor may be ineligible for these types of treatments, or you may opt to not treat your tumor. Or, as discussed, the treatment causes pain during the process of actually treating the pain. So what do you do in these circumstances?

Well, you treat the pain directly with medication or without medication.

Using Medication for Back Pain

For pain that is mild to moderate in intensity, **non-opioids** or **non-narcotic** medications are typically prescribed to manage the pain. Medications in this category include acetaminophen and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

NSAIDs are typically avoided if you're on chemotherapy, blood thinners, steroids, or will be having surgery for your tumor (or any other surgery) within one week.

Sometimes, you may be prescribed nonconventional medications to treat your pain.

- **Antidepressants** are also commonly prescribed to treat neuropathic pain that may be experienced as a result of cancer and cancer treatment.
- **Anticonvulsants** are also prescribed to treat neuropathic pain.
- **Steroids** can help reduce pain in general, especially bone pain, pain caused by spinal cord and brain tumors, and pain caused by inflammation.
- **Opioids** are prescribed to treat severe pain caused by cancer. While non-opioids are often (but not always!) non-prescription, opioids always require a written prescription – and this prescription cannot be faxed, called in, or emailed to a pharmacy.

More About Using Opioids

Opioids came in many different varieties and depending on your needs, and you may be prescribed a variety of different types of opioids to manage your pain.

- “Extended release” typically has “ER” or “XR” after the drug name. These are often taken on a regular basis and treat chronic pain.
- “Immediate release” will have “IR” after the drug name. These drugs work quickly – but they only work for short periods of time. These drugs are great for breakthrough pain.

Sometimes these two types are used together to control chronic pain.

To ensure that you are taking your medications safely, it is important that only one physician prescribe your pain medications.

According to the American Cancer Society, “Doctors will watch you carefully and adjust the doses of pain medicine, so you don’t take too much. For this reason, it’s important that only one doctor prescribe your pain medicines. If you have 2 or more doctors, be sure that one does not prescribe opioids for you without talking to the others about it.”

Also, be aware that if you’re taking pain medications in conjunction with other medications, such as sleeping pills, antidepressants, and antihistamines, serious side effects can occur. Ensure that your physician is aware of all of the medicines you are taking – even over-the-counter medications.