

# National Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month – Become More Aware Of Your Body

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**September is both National Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month and Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Month, and it's a good opportunity for women to schedule their well-woman exam and determine if they – or someone they love – are due for an important preventive health screening.**

By Kim Sorensen

About 22,000 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer each year in the U.S. About 12,000 American women are diagnosed with cervical cancer each year, and around 4,000 will die from the disease.

The good news is that cervical cancer is one of the most preventable cancers: when caught early, the five-year survival rate is nearly 100 percent.

That's why gynecological health is important at all stages of adult life. Cervical cancer can affect women before or after menopause and it's never too late to start getting screened. Whether it's for you, a friend, family member, or partner, there are three things you can do to stay as healthy as possible.

Number one, know your body. Being aware of your body is important at any age. It's important to know how your body normally looks and feels. If you notice any changes, tenderness, or pain, you should get checked out by a health care provider as soon as possible.

Number two, know your risk factors. Learn the risks of gynecologic cancers, including a family history of ovarian or breast cancer, and take steps to prevent and catch them early when they are most treatable. For example, older women are most at risk for ovarian cancer — about half of the women who are diagnosed with ovarian cancer are age 63 or older. And anyone with a cervix and ovaries, including transgender people, can develop cervical and ovarian cancer.

The third thing to know is when you're due for a checkup. The earlier cancer is detected and treated, the better. The frequency for checkups is different for different women, but everyone should see their health care providers regularly. National medical guidelines call for initial Pap tests at age 21; Pap tests every three years for women aged 21–29; and Pap tests every three years for women aged 30–64 (or every five years when women 30–64 receive combined Pap and HPV tests). Women with certain abnormalities may require more frequent Pap tests, so confirm with your health care provider to see if you are due for a checkup and screening, and encourage your loved ones to do the same.

In 2012, Planned Parenthood health centers provided nearly 500,000 Pap tests. Planned Parenthood also provided advanced testing and treatment for thousands of women with abnormal Pap tests and precancerous conditions. In fact, cancer screening and prevention accounted for 10 percent of Planned Parenthood's health services in 2012.

As the nation's leading women's health care provider, advocate, and educator, Planned Parenthood encourages every woman to visit her health care provider regularly to receive a checkup that can screen for gynecologic cancers, and also may include contraceptive counseling, birth control prescriptions, breast exams, and testing for STIs, including HIV.

So this month, take the time to check in with yourself and your health care provider so that you can keep yourself as healthy as possible.

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