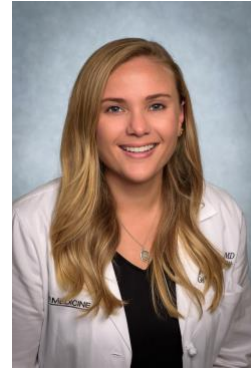


## **STRONG WOMEN ... STRONG COMMUNITY**

### **Five silent symptoms of ovarian cancer**

By Dr. Teresa Boitano  
Gynecologist Oncologist  
Assistant Professor  
UAB Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology



As with other cancers, the earlier the diagnosis of ovarian cancer is given, the greater the chance can be for a good outcome. However, an early diagnosis can be hard to achieve as most women have few if any symptoms. That is why this disease is known as the “silent killer”. Thus, women should be mindful of these five silent symptoms to increase the chances of early detection.

#### **Bloating**

Bloating can be a common symptom for some women during their monthly cycle, but most do not know that it can be a symptom of ovarian cancer. The feeling can occur frequently or can be persistent and can often lead to a woman feeling like she gets full quickly after eating only a small amount.

If bloating cannot be associated around the time of a cycle or appears to be getting worse, it might be time to visit the primary care physician or gynecologist to look at potential causes.

#### **Abdominal or pelvic pain**

A persistent pain, or one that occurs most days, in the stomach or pelvic region is another silent symptom to be aware of. It can be a new type of pain that could get progressively worse. Women also might notice that they have increased pain with intercourse that is new.

#### **Fatigue**

The third silent symptom is a feeling of tiredness, and one that does not improve with getting more rest. If a woman finds herself feeling fatigued for days to weeks, and that power nap or extra cappuccino doesn't seem to provide the “pick-me-up” she should discuss it with a medical provider.

#### **Changes in bowel habits**

If a woman starts having sudden issues with either constipation or diarrhea, it can be a sign of ovarian cancer, particularly if this usually persists for an extended period and is not a routine issue a woman has been dealing with.

## **Frequent urination**

The last silent symptom of ovarian cancer is some women will feel that they must use the bathroom more often than normal. Also, some women will experience burning or pressure sensation during urination.

## **Next steps**

While these symptoms hopefully will not be associated with ovarian cancer, it is important for a woman to be evaluated if she is noticing differences in her body. Depending on the symptoms and exam, next steps with the health care provider may include laboratory evaluation and imaging.

It is essential to raise awareness about ovarian cancer and its symptoms. If a woman is experiencing abnormal symptoms or knows of a friend experiencing one or more of the silent symptoms, it is important to have a conversation, though it may be difficult, and encourage medical evaluation.

Education and advocacy will empower women to recognize possible symptoms, take control of their health and pursue medical attention swiftly when indicated.