

Fertility and ovarian cancer

Having ovarian cancer, and the treatment you may receive for it, may affect your fertility. If the cancer is detected early enough, you may be able to get fertility-sparing surgery, but that isn't possible for everyone. Many people are concerned about the impact of ovarian cancer on their ability to have children, particularly if they want to start a family in the near future.

Raising a child is difficult at the best of times, so you may feel that trying to have a baby while getting treatment for cancer is too much to bear. That is completely understandable, and you should absolutely not feel pressured or like you have somehow 'failed' in your timing.

Rather, if having a baby is something that is important to you and that you see in your future, you should explore what options are available to help you become a parent before or after treatment.

Your fertility options depend on several things, including your age, the stage of your cancer, and the type of treatment you're receiving.

If you are considering parenthood and are of child-bearing age, it will be important to discuss with your healthcare team the potential impacts of treatment on your fertility, your thoughts about having a family, and your options, including how you feel about alternative means of creating a family.

If you are unable to become pregnant naturally, the following options may still be available to you:

IVF – In vitro fertilisation (IVF) is the process by which eggs are fertilised by sperm outside the womb. This could be the sperm of a partner or through donation. Depending on your situation when you were diagnosed, you might want to choose to have your eggs harvested before starting treatment. If this is not possible, you may be able to use a donor egg.

Surrogate – If IVF is not an option for you, you may be able to use a surrogate, i.e., another woman who becomes pregnant by artificial insemination, and gives birth to your child. It is important to thorough-



ly research local laws beforehand if you are interested in surrogacy as an option, so that you – and anyone else involved – are clear on your rights.

Adopting or fostering – Adopting or fostering a child can be a wonderful way to be a parent, because there are children who are unable to live with their birth family and would stand to benefit profoundly from the love you could give them. While adoption is intended to be a permanent situation, fostering can be for limited periods of time, so it's important to think about which option would be best for you.

Not having children – Whether or not you have a partner, being a parent isn't for everyone. You shouldn't feel under any pressure to be a mother, unless you really want to be. Some people choose not to for a multitude of reasons. Remember that it's your choice and no one else's.

References

Ovarian Cancer Action. A younger woman's guide to ovarian cancer. Available at: https://cdn.ovarian.org.uk/media/documents/A_younger_womans_guide_to_ovarian_cancer_OCA.pdf Accessed September 2022.