

# Getting a second opinion

When you are diagnosed with ovarian cancer, your healthcare team will start to create a treatment plan.

The best practice approach is to form a **multidisciplinary team (MDT)** of specialists to make the correct and accurate diagnosis and to recommend the best treatment plan for your specific circumstances.

A multidisciplinary team for ovarian cancer can typically include:<sup>1,2</sup>

- A gynaecologic oncologist (a gynaecologist who specialises in cancers of the female reproductive system, including the vagina, cervix, uterus and ovaries)
- An medical oncologist (cancer specialist)
- A gynaecological cancer specialist nurse
- A pathologist who confirms the diagnosis and type of the tumour
- A radiologist who interprets medical scans to see what is happening inside the body

Your healthcare team will decide your treatment plan based on national guidelines and 'standard of care' recommendations for your particular type and staging of cancer.<sup>3</sup> They will also consider the benefits of each treatment option versus the side effects.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to remember that not all countries use the MDT structure of care and may co-ordinate different specialties differently.

## A second opinion

If you are unsure or unhappy about any aspect of your diagnosis or your treatment plan, you may wish to seek out a second opinion.

A second opinion means going to another specialist or doctor to get their opinion on your diagnosis or treatment. This does not necessarily mean that you will change your doctor.

There are lots of reasons why you may want to have a second opinion, including:



- You may like to have another specialist confirm your diagnosis – just to be sure
- You may want to be certain that the treatment plan your doctor recommended is the best option for you
- You may want reassurance about what you have already been told
- You don't feel satisfied with the relationship that you have with your current doctor<sup>5</sup>
- To explore other potential treatment options that are not offered in your local cancer centre

**The relationship with your doctor is really important and will last a long time. If you don't feel satisfied with the relationship you might want to find a different practitioner.**

## How to get a second opinion

Talk to your current doctor if you would like to have a second opinion.

You may be worried that asking your doctor for a recommendation or advice about a second opinion may upset or offend them, however this is very unlikely. Requesting a second opinion should not affect your relationship with your current doctor and will not impact the quality of care that you receive from them.

It may be worth thinking about the specific reason why you want a second opinion and then doing some research and choosing an appropriate consultant based on the questions you have. You may also be able to find this information from patient support and advocacy groups in your country. Click [here](#) to find groups near you.

Referral pathways for second opinions depend on the healthcare structure of each country and your primary treating team will be able to advise you and guide you in the different ways of referral that suit your condition.

When you are referred for a second opinion, all of your medical information will be sent to the new doctor, including medical records, imaging, and test results.<sup>3</sup>

Once you have had the second opinion, the recommended care and treatment will usually be carried out by your original healthcare team. If you wish to transfer your care over to the new doctor, they must agree, and this must be arranged by the hospitals.<sup>5</sup>

## Advantages and disadvantages of getting a second opinion

### Advantages

- If both doctors agree about your diagnosis and proposed treatment, you may feel more confident in the plan for your care moving forward
- You may find that you have a better relationship with the second doctor
- You could be offered different treatments or participation in a clinical trial

### Disadvantages

- Waiting on the appointment for a second opinion will likely mean a delay to starting treatment
- You may be disappointed or upset if you receive the same, or different, news about your diagnosis and treatment options.<sup>3</sup>

### References

1. CRUK. Treatment decisions for ovarian cancer. Available from: <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/ovarian-cancer/treatment/treatment-decisions> (Accessed April 2023)

2. Cancer.Net. The Oncology Team. Available at: <https://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/cancer-basics/cancer-care-team/oncology-team>. (Accessed April 2023)

3. Macmillan Cancer Support. Getting a second opinion. Available from: <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/treatment/your-treatment-options/getting-a-second-opinion> (Accessed April 2023)

4. Healthtalk. Treatment decisions in ovarian cancer. Available from: <https://healthtalk.org/ovarian-cancer/treatment-decisions-for-ovarian-cancer> (Accessed April 2023)

5. CRUK. Getting a second opinion. Available from: <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/treatment/access-to-treatment/different-doctor-second-opinion> (Accessed April 2023)