

## Women's cancer and Afternoon Teal

### *The Health Column*

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February is Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month – an annual Ovarian Cancer Australia campaign. This campaign raises awareness of the signs and symptoms, risks and impact of ovarian cancer. It also raises vital funds to support Ovarian Cancer Australia's work in awareness, support, advocacy and research. This February, Ovarian Cancer Australia invites Australians to host an Afternoon 'Teal' (teal is the international colour for ovarian cancer). It is an opportunity to bring family, friends and local community together to raise awareness for ovarian cancer.



Ovarian cancer is a disease where some of the cells in one or both ovaries start to grow abnormally and develop into cancer.

Approximately 1,400 Australian women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer each year. Sadly, the death rate for ovarian cancer is relatively high – 2 out of 3 Australian women diagnosed with ovarian cancer will die, and around 75% of women are diagnosed at an advanced stage.

To help turn these figures around, money is being raised through Afternoon Teal events and other activities throughout February.

Ovarian cancer isn't the only cancer affecting women alone. Others include:

- breast
- cervical
- endometrial
- fallopian tube
- uterine sarcoma
- vaginal
- vulvar.

Early detection of these cancers is critical for a good outcome. Keeping up-to-date with body screening and observing your body are the best ways to ensure early detection. Things to watch out for include:

- breast changes such as skin dimpling, nipple discharge and lumps
- bloating that doesn't go away after one or two weeks
- bleeding between periods
- general skin changes
- pain that doesn't go away.

Australia has national screening programs for breast and cervical cancers. Women aged 18–70 should have a pap smear every two years. Women aged 50–74 should have a mammogram every two years. Always remember to book in your bi-annual pap smears and mammograms, and set reminders in your phone or write them on your calendar.

Prevention also goes a long way to avoiding women's cancers. The following are simple ways to reduce your cancer risk:

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Engage in physical activity for at least 30 minutes each day.
- Eat more fruit, vegetables and whole grains.
- Reduce your fat, sugar and salt intake.
- Limit red meat in your diet.
- Cut down on alcohol.
- Breastfeeding is best, if you can.
- Quit smoking.
- Vaccinate against cancer-causing infections like human papillomavirus (HPV).

Your local pharmacy can help too. Pharmacists are medicines and health information experts. They can assist you by explaining how your medicines work, what possible side effects they may cause and give you information about how to reduce your cancer risk.

You can get more information from pharmacies providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information. Self Care Fact Cards available from these pharmacies include topics such as *Breast awareness and Pap smear*, as well as lifestyle topics such as *Staying a non-smoker* and *Weight and health*.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to [www.psa.org.au/selfcare](http://www.psa.org.au/selfcare), then click 'Find a *Self Care pharmacy* near you'.