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Reproductive Needs of
Children and Adolescents

Ovarian Cysts

What are ovarian cysts?

Ovarian cysts are very common. There are many different types of ovarian cysts.

Some are normal and are called *physiologic cysts*. These cysts are small pockets of fluid inside the ovary that form naturally during the menstrual cycle. Hormones signal your ovaries to develop follicles, release eggs, and to make estrogen and other hormones. All of these normal activities of the ovary can cause cysts.

Other types of cysts can be very large, have multiple pockets, or contain different tissue types such as hair, bone, and fluid (these cysts are called *dermoid cysts* or *teratomas*). These may require surgery for removal.

What are the symptoms of ovarian cysts?

Sometimes ovarian cysts cause symptoms and sometimes they do not. Young women may experience pain or cramping in their lower abdomen. Pain may come and go. Some cysts may burst open and cause bleeding, but this is not likely. This usually causes pain. If a cyst is very large, you might be able to feel a lump in the lower abdomen.

How will my healthcare provider diagnose ovarian cysts?

An ovarian cyst might be found during a physical exam if it is large enough for your doctor to feel. Cysts are often found using an ultrasound to look at the ovaries and uterus.

How are ovarian cysts treated?

Treatment depends on the type of ovarian cyst. *Physiologic cysts* usually disappear after a few weeks. Pain medications such as naproxen, ibuprofen and acetaminophen may help with pain. Your doctor may recommend using hormonal medications to control your cycles and prevent new cysts from forming. Large cysts that do not go away or are causing severe pain may need to be removed with surgery. If surgery is needed, most of the time a cyst can be removed from your ovary without damaging the ovary.

After ovarian cysts are treated, will they come back? Will they cause problems later?

Physiologic cysts will come back because they are part of the normal menstrual cycle. However, the cysts may not always cause pain or discomfort. If these cysts are continuing to cause pain, using hormonal medications can help prevent the cysts from coming back.

If you have a cyst that is surgically removed, there is a chance the cyst could come back or a new cyst could grow. Talk to your healthcare provider to see if he or she recommends using ultrasound to check for new cysts.

Most cysts do not cause problems in the future. If you have multiple small cysts on both ovaries and are diagnosed with “Polycystic Ovaries” or ‘PCOS’ then you should discuss how this can affect your ability to get pregnant in the future as well as risk for diabetes and high cholesterol.