What health effects will a woman with one ovary experience? [1]

Dear Alice,

I'm a nineteen-year-old female. I had my right ovary removed (oophorectomy) three years ago due to a very large ovarian cyst. I was assured by my gynecologist that I'm still capable of bearing children but wasn't informed thoroughly of all of the pros and cons in regards to this type of operation (e.g., can the estrogen loss have any negative physical affects?). If you could shed some light on this matter, it would be greatly appreciated. Thanks.

? Desperate

Answer

Dear Desperate,

There are pros and cons to every surgical procedure. Three years ago, before your surgery, some people weighed the pros and cons to decide if the oophorectomy was the best option for you. It sounds like you weren't too involved in this decision, or maybe things weren't explained in a clear, understandable way. For your peace of mind, the people who decided to operate might have considered some potential benefits, such as a lower risk of ovarian cancer and its associated pain and discomfort, etc. A con might have included the general risks of any surgical procedure, among others. Ultimately, they decided to operate.

So, here you are three years later, and you want to know if this procedure will impact your life in any way. You asked specifically about the effects of the oophorectomy on estrogen. Fortunately, your body should be making the same amount of estrogen it always did. Ovulation (the monthly release of an egg from the ovary) normally alternates between the two ovaries. When one is removed, the other ovary takes over the entire fertility function, popping out an egg each month and continuing to produce estrogen.

Some research suggests, however, that women with one ovary may experience menopause earlier than women with two ovaries and may be more likely to conceive a child with Down Syndrome. These are issues that you may want to bring up with your health care provider.

If you choose to plan for pregnancy, and you try to conceive for a year without success, consider checking in with your provider or gynecologist to make sure that your remaining ovary is functioning normally. At that time, you and your provider can look into any other factors that could be interfering with your fertility. These are steps that many women, with one
Now that it’s been three years since your surgery, how would you feel about making an appointment for a check-up? Talking with your women’s health care provider or gynecologist about your concerns is very important. Your health care provider is a great resource for information and assurance that goes beyond what you can learn on any health information site. Plus, your provider sees you and knows your unique history.

If you choose to make an appointment, you could explain that you need time to discuss concerns related to your surgery. That way, they can schedule a talking appointment and give you extra time. In preparation, it would help to make a list of your specific questions and concerns. Would you like to learn more about the oophorectomy procedure, itself? What else do you want to know about your reproductive health? Remember, no one can read your mind—not even the best health care provider.

If you don’t get the information you want or need from your health care provider or gynecologist, it’s important to take the opportunity to get a second opinion. Your primary care provider, insurance company, or trusted friends can help you find someone who is willing to take the time to talk with you. Many health care providers truly believe that education is an important part of health care.

Hope this information and these suggestions bring you some calm,

Alice!

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