

A dermoid cyst of the ovary is an abnormal growth, usually benign, in the ovary that typically contains a diversity of tissues including hair, teeth, bone, thyroid, etc. A dermoid cyst develops from a totipotential germ cell (a primary oocyte) that is retained within the egg sac (ovary). Being totipotential, that cell can give rise to all orders of cells necessary to form mature tissues and recognizable structures such as hair, bone and sebaceous (oily) material, neural tissue and teeth.

Dermoid cysts may occur at any age but the prime age of detection is in the childbearing years. The average age is 30. Up to 15% of women with ovarian teratomas have them in both ovaries. Dermoid cysts can range in size from a centimeter up to 45 cm in diameter. These cysts can cause the ovary to twist (torsion) and imperil its blood supply. The larger the dermoid cyst, the greater the risk of rupture with spillage of the greasy contents, which can create problems with adhesions, pain etc. Although the large majority (about 98%) of these tumors are benign, the remaining fraction (about 2%) becomes cancerous (malignant).

Treatment for a dermoid cyst is laparoscopic cystectomy (surgical removal of an ovarian cyst). If there is any concern that the cyst may contain pre-cancer or cancer cells, a **frozen section** should be performed at the time, and a gynaecological oncologist should perform the surgical procedure.