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# Ovarian cancer scare turns into a blessing for young Madison couple

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**HUNTSVILLE, Alabama**

(<http://al.com/>)-- Less than a year after Jesse Robinson married, she started having severe abdominal pains. So she called her mother, a nurse at Huntsville Hospital, who said it might be appendicitis.

Jesse was just 27 at the time. But

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**Jesse Robinson and her husband Robbie enjoy spending time with their only child, Connor, at their Madison home. (The Huntsville Times/Robin Conn)**

couldn't bear to tell her daughter. Instead, she asked her daughter's husband, Robbie Robinson, to break the news.

"I don't know that I've ever been that scared in my life," said Robbie. "I was shaking all over."

September is Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month, an opportunity to make all women more aware of the early symptoms of the often fatal disease.

Today, 31-year-old Jesse Robinson is a stay-at-home mom of 20-month-old Connor. Robbie works for Northrop-Grumman and the family lives in Madison.

Jesse had been diagnosed with stage 3C of borderline ovarian cancer, which could have been fatal or could have prevented her from having children, although the Robinsons had not at the time planned on having any.

Jesse said she "had a meltdown" when she first got the news, and it took a while to calm down.

Two days after getting home from the hospital - on Robbie's birthday - they began searching the Internet for articles about ovarian cancer, but became frustrated at the lack of information available.

"Just not knowing was the scary part," said Jesse, who is on a mission this month to make all women aware of the symptoms.

After a successful surgery to remove a 3.5-pound tumor from her right ovary, Jesse learned her left ovary looked "suspicious" but the surgeon didn't want to remove it because of her young age.

Over the course of the next 18 months, Jesse and Robbie changed their minds about having children. She soon became pregnant with Connor who was delivered by C-section. After Connor's delivery, the doctor removed Jesse's left ovary just to be safe.

The couple now warn that there is too little information available about ovarian cancer, especially borderline ovarian cancer, which is "not rare, but not common either," said Jesse's surgeon and former oncologist, Dr. Joe Kelly.

"Some doctors may only see a few cases their entire career," said Kelly, "so they may not always think of ovarian cancer when they hear the symptoms."

Of the 22,000 American women diagnosed with it each year, 15,000 die. Jesse doesn't want to limit awareness to September. She and Dr. Kelly hope awareness of the disease will grow as prevalent as breast cancer awareness. Both urge people to donate toward research.

Kelly said there is no blood test or screening to diagnose ovarian cancer and it is often "too late" once discovered.

after reviewing Jesse's hospital records, her mom, Charlotte Smith, discovered her daughter had ovarian cancer, a disease more often associated with women over 50. She

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He said while ovarian cancer patients do not all share the same symptoms, many do have similar ones - bloating, pelvic or abdominal pain, difficulty eating or feeling full quickly, or urinary symptoms (urgency or frequency) for an extended period of time.

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Also, Kelly said anyone with a family history of cancer, not limited to but primarily ovarian and breast cancer, should be aware of any of the above symptoms. Kelly said many of his patients are referred to him by gastrointestinal doctors because women think they have abdominal problems associated with bowel-related diseases when it's actually ovarian cancer. He said while a test for the gene is available through a swab of the cheek, it can be very expensive, about \$3,000.

"If caught in the early stages, the success rate is quite tremendous," said Kelly. "No one really knows what causes it, but a few are predisposed to it, especially those who have menstrual periods without large breaks, or women who bleed after menopause."

Here are some Huntsville area Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month being sponsored by or promoted by the Lilies of the Valley nonprofit organization:

Saturday: Teal Tunes in the Garden, 4-6 p.m. Members, their families, friends and caregivers are invited to bring a picnic lunch. Entertainment provided by the Huntsville Concert Band.

Sept. 27: Annual HudsonAlpha "Tie the Ribbon" luncheon at noon for breast and ovarian cancer awareness (For more info, see hudsonalpha.org or call 256-327-0442)

Sept. 28: North Alabama Nurse Practitioner Association Symposium at Huntsville Marriott, 5 Tranquility Base. Dr. Joe Engle will speak about ovarian cancer at 3:30 p.m. (For more info, see northalabamanpa.com).

Sept. 29: Health Fair for military retirees, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., at Redstone Arsenal.

With the exception of September, ovarian cancer survivors and caregivers meet the last Tuesday of each month at 5:30 p.m. at Clearview Cancer Institute community room.

To make a donation in honor or memory of someone, send a tax-deductible check payable to Lilies of the Valley, 2002 Danbury Circle S.W., Huntsville, AL 35803. For more information, email [liliesofthevalleyemail@gmail.com](mailto:liliesofthevalleyemail@gmail.com) (<mailto:liliesofthevalleyemail@gmail.com>).

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**(http://connect.al.com/user/renee\_tucker/index.html) Renee\_Eisgrau Tucker\_39**

I was also in my late 20's when I was diagnosed with borderline ovarian cancer. I had lost a lot of weight, and couldn't eat. My left ovary was removed, large tumor, and the Dr also said they wanted to keep my right ovary in case I wanted more children. (Just gave birth to a daughter). I had a consult at UAB and was told the disease would return, and about 1 1/2 later, it did, and I had a total hysterectomy. I am in my 50's now, and doing great. I now watch my daughter for symptoms, which there isn't any definite symptoms to look for. Good luck to you, congrats on Connor. It was terrifying for me as well...but hang in there, you will do great!

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