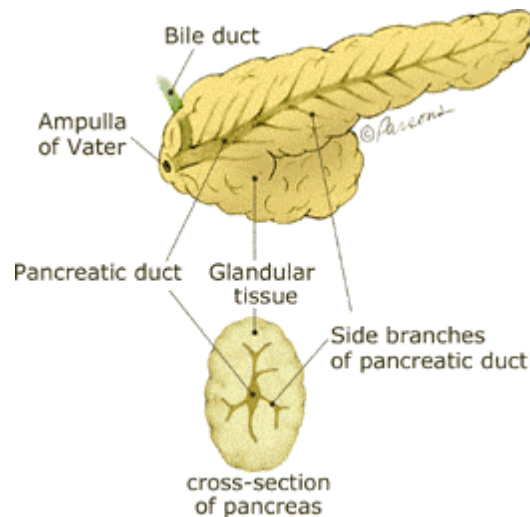


## November is Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month

### What is Pancreatic Cancer?

Pancreatic cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells in the pancreas. The pancreas is a gland located deep in the abdomen between the stomach and the spine (backbone). The liver, intestine, blood vessels, and other organs surround the pancreas. The pancreas is about 6 inches long and is shaped like a flat pear. The widest part of the pancreas is the head, the middle section is the body, and the thinnest part is the tail.



About 90% of pancreatic cancers are found in the pancreatic ducts. These ducts make special enzymes that help with food digestion. About two thirds of pancreatic cancers are in the head of the pancreas. This is the part closest to the beginning of the small bowel. This type of pancreatic cancer can be fast growing and may spread to the liver, nearby lymph nodes, and nerves surrounding the pancreas. There are other, rarer types of pancreatic cancers that rarely spread to other parts of the pancreas. Pancreatic cancers that occur in these areas have different names depending on the type of cell that becomes cancerous.

### What Are the Key Statistics About Pancreatic Cancer?

Pancreatic cancer is now the fourth leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States for both men and women. The latest statistics about pancreatic cancer show that 57,600 new cases will be diagnosed in the United States this year and 45,050 patients will die. This is because by the time pancreatic cancer is diagnosed, it is usually not curable. The only chance for cure is through surgery. Yet, about 80% of patients cannot have surgery because most patients' cancer has spread outside the pancreas or to major vessels. The 5-year survival for patients diagnosed with local disease is 37%. This is because the disease spread early to other body sites and tiny areas of cancer cannot be seen on CT scans, MRI, or during

surgery since it is so small. Surgery can often lengthen survival time as well as maintain better quality of life, even if the disease returns at a later time.

## **Who's at Risk?**

- Cigarette smoking has a strong connection to the risk of developing pancreatic cancer. The risk is higher in people who smoke more cigarettes and for longer periods of time. The risk slowly decreases once a person stops smoking.
- In the United States, African-Americans have a slightly higher risk of pancreatic cancer than Caucasians.
- Rates are also higher in the industrialized countries, such as Japan and Western European countries.
- Age is a risk factor. Pancreatic cancer is not common under the age of 50, but increases to its highest occurrence between the ages of 60 to 80.
- A family history of pancreatic cancer as well as a personal history of chronic pancreatitis, diabetes, obesity and high levels of alcohol consumption may increase your risk.
- Individuals with Lynch syndrome as well as BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutation carriers are also at increased risk.

## **What Are Signs and Symptoms of Pancreatic Cancer?**

Most pancreatic cancers spread to sites outside of the original tumor before there are any signs and symptoms. This is because the early symptoms such as fatigue, weight loss, loss of appetite, indigestion, nausea, vomiting, back pain, and abdominal pain can be the result of many common problems such as flu, ulcers, and busy lifestyles. When the cancer blocks the bile ducts that drain from the liver into the small bowel, the bile backs up into the blood stream. Bile salts may leak out from the blood stream and can cause the skin to turn yellow (jaundice) and itch. The whites of the eyes may also turn yellow. Jaundice without pain is the most common symptom that sends a person to the doctor, followed by unusual mid-back pain and the sudden onset of diabetes.

## **Can Pancreatic Cancer be Found Early?**

There are no current screening or early detection tests for pancreatic cancer. Pancreatic cancer is thought to be caused by a complicated process involving cancer-causing genes. There is hope that some day there will be tests so that people at high risk for pancreatic cancer can have early testing and start treatment earlier.

## **Can Pancreatic Cancer be Prevented?**

Avoid cigarette smoking. Diets high in alcohol, coffee, red meat, carbohydrates, cholesterol, salt, dehydrated food, fried food, refined sugar, soybeans, and nitrosamines (used in salted and cured meats) are thought to be linked to pancreatic cancer. Some foods, such as those with fiber and vitamin C, as well as fruits, vegetables, preservative-free foods, and raw foods, are thought to help protect a person from developing pancreatic cancer. At this time, there is little evidence that these factors contribute to decreasing the risk of developing pancreatic cancer.

## **Cancer Prevention Clinical Trials**

If you would like information about nationwide clinical trials for preventing cancer, you can call the National Cancer Institute at 1-800-4 CANCEER or visit their Web site at [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov).

## **Where Can I Find Further Information?**

Resource and Learning Center

732-235-9639

[www.cinj.org/rlc](http://www.cinj.org/rlc)

Provides reliable, relevant and current information about all aspects of cancer.

Pancreatic Cancer Action Network

1-310-725-0025

[www.pancan.org](http://www.pancan.org)

The Lustgarten Foundation for Pancreatic Cancer Research

1-866-789-1000

[www.lustgartenfoundation.org](http://www.lustgartenfoundation.org)

National Cancer Institute

1-800-422-6237

[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

The American Cancer Society

1-800-227-2345

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)



RLC pancreatic cancer website QR code. Scan with smartphone / device.