

PANCREATIC CANCER

Pancreatic cancer is a *malignancy* (cancerous tissue) affecting the pancreas, the organ that produces digestive enzymes and *insulin* (controls the blood sugar). It is most commonly seen in male's 35–70 years old and is the 4th leading cause of cancer deaths in the US. It is not known what causes pancreatic cancer. People of African heritage and those living in certain areas (United States, Israel, Sweden, and Canada), have a higher than normal incidence. Risk is also increased with a history of chronic pancreatitis, diabetes, certain chemical exposure (urea, naphthalene, and benzidine), use of alcohol and tobacco.

Symptoms *may* include:

- Usually none, in early stages
- Pain in the back or abdomen, may be relieved by leaning forward
- *Jaundice* (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
- Unexplained rapid weight loss
- Blood clots in veins of the extremities
- Itching
- Depression

What *your doctor* can do:

- Diagnose cancer of the pancreas by asking about your symptoms, doing a physical exam, laboratory tests, and x-rays.
- Order x-rays of the abdomen, liver and gallbladder.
- Arrange to obtain biopsies (tissue samples for closer study) of the liver or pancreas.
- Schedule a laparotomy (exploratory abdominal surgery).
- Order angiography (X-rays of blood vessels).
- Order pancreatic ultrasound and abdominal CT scan.
- Arrange for ERCP (procedure using endoscope and x-ray dye to view the pancreatic duct).
- Arrange for PTC (x-ray dye is injected into the liver to view pancreatic ducts).
- Prescribe any of several medications to relieve pain or other symptoms.
- Recommend surgical removal of the tumor if it is small, or surgery to relieve bile duct or bowel obstruction.
- Recommend chemotherapy or radiation treatment.
- For further information, you can contact: American Cancer Society toll-free at 1-800-ACS-2345

What you can expect:

- Surgical cure of pancreatic cancer may be successful if the tumor is small and has not spread to other parts of the body.
- Most often, since early symptoms are uncommon, it has already spread by the time of detection. It is unusual to survive for more than a few years after diagnosis.
- Complications can occur, including diabetes, inflammation or infection of the pancreas, and hemorrhage.

Contact your doctor if you develop symptoms of pancreatic cancer.