

About Pancreatic Cancer

The pancreas lies behind the stomach and in front of the spine. There are two kinds of cells in the pancreas. Exocrine pancreas cells make enzymes that are released into the small intestine to help the body digest food

Estimated new cases and deaths from pancreatic cancer in the United States in 2017

New cases: 53,670

Deaths: 43,090

Pancreatic cancer represents 7.2% of all cancer deaths in the U.S.

Risk factors:

- *Smoking*: Smoking tobacco is the most important risk factor for pancreatic cancer. People who smoke tobacco are more likely than nonsmokers to develop this disease. Heavy smokers are most at risk.
- *Diabetes*: People with diabetes are more likely than other people to develop pancreatic cancer.
- *Family history*: Having a mother, father, sister, or brother with pancreatic cancer increases the risk of developing the disease.
- *Inflammation of the pancreas*: Pancreatitis is a painful inflammation of the pancreas. Having pancreatitis for a long time may increase the risk of pancreatic cancer.
- *Obesity*: People who are overweight or obese are slightly more likely than other people to develop pancreatic cancer.

Many other possible risk factors are under active study. For example, researchers are studying whether a diet high in fat (especially animal fat) or heavy drinking of alcoholic beverages may increase the risk of pancreatic cancer. Another area of active research is whether certain genes increase the risk of disease.

Symptoms:

Early cancer of the pancreas often doesn't cause symptoms. When the cancer grows larger, you may notice one or more of these common symptoms:

- Dark urine, pale stools, and yellow skin and eyes from jaundice
- Pain in the upper part of your belly
- Pain in the middle part of your back that doesn't go away when you shift your position
- Nausea and vomiting
- Stools that float in the toilet

Advanced cancer may cause these general symptoms:

- Weakness or feeling very tired
- Loss of appetite or feelings of fullness
- Weight loss for no known reason

These symptoms may be caused by pancreatic cancer or by other health problems. People with these symptoms should tell their doctor so that problems can be diagnosed and treated as early as possible.

Treatment: Treatment options for people with cancer of the pancreas are surgery, chemotherapy, targeted therapy, and radiation therapy. You'll probably receive more than one type of treatment.