

FACT SHEET

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Pancreatic Cancer

Pancreatic cancer is the fourth leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States.¹ In 2009, more than 42,000 people will be diagnosed and about 35,000 people will die from the disease.¹ Pancreatic cancer tends to spread quickly in the body, leading to high mortality and short life expectancy.²

Pancreatic cancer is the uncontrolled growth of cancerous cells in the tissues of the pancreas, a large gland behind the stomach that supports digestion by making enzymes that break down fats from foods so the body can use them. It also makes hormones, such as insulin, to balance blood sugar.^{3,4} While the cause is unknown, most types (95 percent) of pancreatic cancer originate in the part of the pancreas that produces and delivers the digestive enzymes.^{1,3,4} There are two less common types of pancreatic cancer: endocrine (which originates in the pancreatic cells that produce hormones) and ampullary (which originates where the pancreas and intestines connect).³

Risk Factors And Symptoms

- **Age** – more than 80 percent of new cases are diagnosed in people between the ages of 60 and 80¹
- **Gender** – pancreatic cancer is more common in men than women⁵
- **Risk factors** – smoking, obesity, chronic pancreatitis, diabetes, cirrhosis, family history of pancreatic cancer and use of smokeless tobacco¹
- **Symptoms** – these often do not appear until the disease is advanced, but may include upper abdominal pain, jaundice, loss of appetite and weight loss^{1,3,4}

Prognosis And Survival

- The majority of people (76 percent) with any stage of pancreatic cancer survive less than one year after diagnosis, and nearly all (95 percent) will not survive five years¹
- Pancreatic cancer is difficult to treat as it is often resistant to chemotherapy and radiotherapy⁵

Stage	Description	5-Year Survival Rate ⁶
IA	Tumor is limited to the pancreas and ≤ 2 centimeters (cm)	37%
IB	Tumor limited to the pancreas and ≥ 2 cm	21%
IIA	Tumor has spread outside the pancreas but not to large blood vessels	12%
IIB	Tumor is limited to the pancreas or has spread outside the pancreas	6%
III	Tumor has spread outside the pancreas into nearby large blood vessels or major nerves	2%
IV	Tumor has spread to distant sites	1%

Treatment

- Common treatments include surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy and targeted medicines; a doctor will assess the individual and, depending on the stage, may treat with two or three methods at the same time or sequentially⁴

References

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