



The Trinidad and Tobago Cancer Society

Pancreatic Cancer

Early Detection & Treatment Guidelines



www.cancertt.com

How Is Pancreatic Cancer Diagnosed?

After taking down your health history and performing a physical exam, the doctors may order several tests to determine the cause of your problem or extent of the condition, including:

- CT scan (Computed Tomography)
- MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging)
- Endoscopic Ultrasound (EUS)
- Laparoscopy (surgical procedure to look at organs)
- Endoscopic Retrograde Cholangiopancreatography (ERCP): the use of an instrument called an endoscope – a thin, flexible tube with a tiny video camera and light on the end, to diagnose and treat various problems of the GI tract.
- Percutaneous Transhepatic Cholangiography (PTC: procedure used to x-ray liver and bile ducts)
- Biopsy (removal of tissue to view it under a microscope)

What Causes Pancreatic Cancer?

It is still not known exactly what causes most cases of pancreatic cancer. However, the following are possible risk factors for pancreatic cancer:

- Smoking
- Long-standing diabetes
- Obesity
- Alcohol
- Chronic pancreatitis
- Certain hereditary conditions, such as hereditary pancreatitis, multiple endocrine neoplasia type 1 syndrome, hereditary non-polyposis colon cancer (HNPCC; Lynch syndrome), von Hippel-Lindau syndrome, ataxia-telangiectasia, and the familial atypical multiple mole melanoma syndrome (FAMMM).

What Are The Symptoms Of Pancreatic Cancer?

Pancreatic cancer is sometimes called a “silent disease” because early pancreatic cancer often does not cause symptoms. But, as the cancer grows, symptoms may include:

- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes)
- Pain in the upper or middle abdomen and back
- Unexplained weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Fatigue and weakness

What Is The Pancreas?

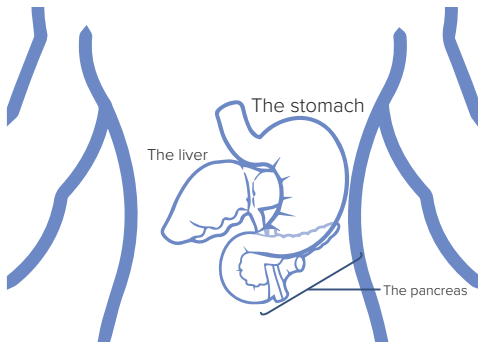
The pancreas is an organ found behind the stomach. The pancreas contains 2 different kinds of glands. The exocrine glands make pancreatic “juice” that has enzymes which break down fats and proteins in foods so the body can use them. Most of the cells in the pancreas are part of the exocrine system. A smaller number of cells in the pancreas are endocrine cells. These cells are arranged in clusters called islets. They make hormones (such as insulin) that help balance the amount of sugars in the blood.

What Is Pancreatic Cancer?

Pancreatic cancer is a disease in which malignant (cancer) cells form in the tissues of the pancreas. Both the exocrine and endocrine cells of the pancreas can form tumors, but those formed by the exocrine pancreas are much more common. A small number of tumors are not cancer (benign, pronounced be-nine).

How Is Pancreatic Cancer Treated?

Pancreatic cancer can be controlled only if it is found before it has spread, when it can be removed by surgery. At the time of diagnosis, only about 20% of pancreatic tumors can be removed by surgery. The standard procedure is called a pancreatodutodenectomy (Whipple procedure). When the tumor is confined to the pancreas but cannot be removed, a combination of radiation therapy and chemotherapy may be recommended. When the tumor has spread (metastasized) to other organs such as the liver, chemotherapy alone is usually used. If the cancer has spread, palliative treatment can improve the patient's quality of life by controlling the symptoms and complications of its disease.



The Trinidad and Tobago Cancer Society recommends that you always consult your healthcare provider.

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