



THE TRINIDAD & TOBAGO CANCER SOCIETY

Pancreatic Cancer

Early Detection & Treatment Guidelines

What is the pancreas?

The pancreas is an organ located behind the stomach. It has two primary functions:

- Exocrine function: Produces digestive enzymes.
- Endocrine function: Produces hormones like insulin to regulate blood sugar.

What is pancreatic cancer?

Pancreatic cancer occurs when abnormal cells in the pancreas grow uncontrollably. It is one of the most aggressive cancers, often diagnosed at an advanced stage due to vague early symptoms.

The majority of pancreatic cancers arise from the exocrine glands. A small portion affects the endocrine cells (neuroendocrine tumors).

What are the risk factors for pancreatic cancer?

- Age – Risk increases after 60.
- Smoking – Heavy smokers have a 2-3x higher risk.
- Chronic pancreatitis – Long-term inflammation raises cancer risk.
- Diabetes – Especially if newly diagnosed in older adults.
- Obesity & Sedentary Lifestyle – Linked to increased risk.
- Family History & Genetic Syndromes – Lynch syndrome, BRCA mutations, etc.
- Excessive Alcohol Use – Can contribute to chronic pancreatitis.

What are the symptoms of pancreatic cancer?

Pancreatic cancer is often called a "silent disease" because it rarely causes symptoms early on. As it progresses, symptoms may include:

- Jaundice (yellowing of skin and eyes).
- Upper abdominal/back pain.
- Unexplained weight loss & loss of appetite.
- Dark urine & pale stools.
- Fatigue and digestive issues.

If you experience these symptoms persistently, consult your doctor.

How is pancreatic cancer diagnosed?

Because early detection is difficult, imaging and biopsy are crucial for diagnosis:

- CT Scan or MRI – Detailed imaging of the pancreas.
- Endoscopic Ultrasound (EUS) – Detects small tumors.
- ERCP (Endoscopic Retrograde Cholangiopancreatography)
 - Examines bile and pancreatic ducts.
- Biopsy – Confirms cancer through tissue sampling.
- Blood Tests (CA 19-9 Tumor Marker) – Helps track disease

Can pancreatic cancer be prevented?

- Quit smoking – A major preventable risk factor.
- Maintain a healthy weight & exercise regularly.
- Limit alcohol intake – Reduces risk of chronic pancreatitis.
- Control diabetes – Proper management lowers risk.

How is pancreatic cancer treated?

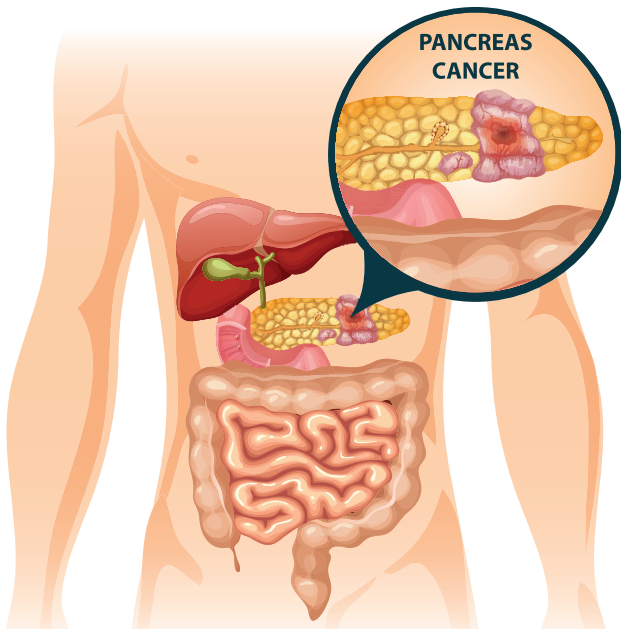
Treatment depends on cancer stage and overall health:

- Surgery (Whipple Procedure) – For early-stage cancer that hasn't spread.
- Chemotherapy – Given before or after surgery or as the main treatment for advanced cancer.
- Radiation Therapy – Used alongside chemo for localized but inoperable tumors.
- Targeted Therapy & Immunotherapy – Options for specific genetic mutations.
- Palliative Care – Focuses on symptom relief for advanced cases.



Why early detection matters

Pancreatic cancer has one of the lowest survival rates, but early detection increases survival chances. Seek medical evaluation if you have persistent symptoms or risk factors.





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