

## CancerInDepth:PancreaticCancer

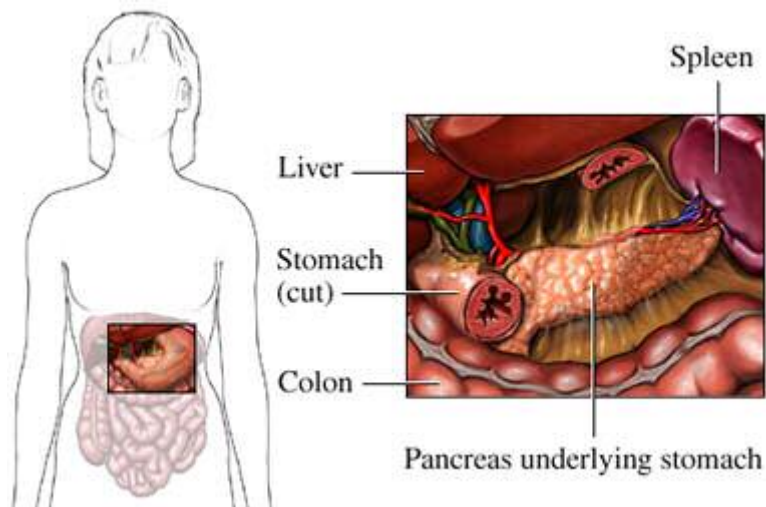
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Pancreaticcanceroccurswhencellswithinthepancreasbegintogrowabnormallyinanuncontrolledandinvasive way.

Thepancreasisanorganlocatedbehindandtotherightofthestomach,neartheliver,gallbladder,andintestine. Theareaofthepancreasontherightsideofthebody,closettothefirstsectionofthesmallintestine,iscalledthe “head”ofthepancreas;themiddlesection,behindthestomach,iscalledthe“body”ofthepancreas;andthe sectionontheleftsideofthebody,closettothespleen,iscalledthe“tail”ofthepancreas.

ThePancreas



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Thepancreasmadeupoftwoverydifferentkindsofcells:endocrinecellsandexocrinecells.Theendocrine cellsproduceanumberofdifferentchemicalscalledhormonesthatenterthebloodstreamandtraveltootherareas ofthebodytoexerttheireffects.Forexample,theendocrinecellsofthepancreasproduceinsulin,whichbreaks downandthenusesorstoresugarsfromfood.

Theexocrinecellsofthepancreasproducedigestivejuicesthattravelthroughasystemoftubescalledductsinto thefirstsectionoftheintestine,theduodenum.Thesedigestivejuicescontainenzymesthatelpprocessfat, protein,andcarbohydratesinfood,breakingthemdownintosmallerunitsforbetterusebythebody.

### CancerofthePancreas

Thepancreasplaysacrucialroleinthebody’sabilitytoprocessfood,makingitbleto generateanduseenergy. Pancreaticcancergreatlyinterfereswiththesefunctions,bydamaginganddestroyingnormalcellswithinthe pancreas.

Apancreatictumor growswhencellsofthepancreasbecomecancerous.Thesecancercellsbegintodivideand multiplymorequicklythannormalcells.Cancercellalsolacktheabilitytoorganizethemselvesinanormalway

and have the capability to invade other normal tissue.

Cancer of the exocrine cells of the pancreas occurs much more frequently than cancer of the endocrine (or islet) cells of the pancreas. In fact, about 95% of all pancreatic cancers are within the exocrine system. This report covers aspects of this more common form of pancreatic cancer, called adenocarcinoma.

## Whom Is Affected?

Pancreatic cancer is the fourth most common type of cancer in men, and the fifth most common type of cancer in women. Men are twice as likely as women to develop pancreatic cancer. It tends to strike people over the age of 50 (85%). Unfortunately, there are no methods of detecting pancreatic cancer at an early stage. Furthermore, the condition usually progresses very rapidly; the average life span after diagnosis is four to eight months. The five-year survival rate is less than 5%. Over 33,000 Americans are diagnosed yearly with pancreatic cancer; about 25,000 Americans die of the disease each year.

## Causes and Complications

No one knows exactly what causes pancreatic cancer. It's been proven that smokers, diabetics, or those with stomach resection have a 2 to 3 times greater risk of developing the disease. Some families also seem to have an increased risk of pancreatic cancer.

Because pancreatic cancer interferes with the body's ability to utilize nutrients, unintended weight loss is a common symptom of the disease. Unfortunately, severe pain is also associated with pancreatic cancer. As the pancreatic tumor grows and obstructs some of the liver and gallbladder ducts, jaundice (a yellow discoloration of the skin and the whites of the eyes) develops.

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