



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Uncontrolled growth of malignant cells in the pancreas. This is the 4th leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S. The pancreas is an organ in the upper mid-abdomen that produces intestinal enzymes to help digest food and insulin to control blood sugar. Pancreas cancer affects adults ages 35-70 and men more often than women.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Rapid, unexplained weight loss.
- Pain in the back or upper abdomen that is often relieved by bending forward.
- Blood clots in veins anywhere, especially the arms and legs. This is often an early sign.
- Jaundice (yellow skin and eyes) from blockage of the nearby bile duct. Jaundice is usually accompanied by intense itching.
- Depression.

CAUSES

Unknown.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Chronic pancreatitis.
- Diabetes mellitus.
- Genetic factors: This is more common in blacks than in Caucasians.
- Smoking.
- Excess alcohol consumption.
- Geographic location: The incidence is higher in Israel, the U.S., Sweden and Canada than in other parts of the world.
- Poor nutrition, especially a diet high in fat, protein and processed foods containing many food additives.
- Exposure to industrial chemicals, such as urea, naphthalene or benzidine.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Cannot be prevented. Avoid risk factors where possible.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- This condition is currently considered incurable. Survival for more than 1 or 2 years is unlikely. However, symptoms can be relieved or controlled.
- Scientific research into causes and treatment continues, so there is hope for increasingly effective treatment and cure.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Hemorrhage into the intestinal tract.
- Pancreas infections.
- Spread of cancer to liver, other abdominal organs and lungs (usually has already occurred by the time of diagnosis).
- Diabetes mellitus.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnostic tests may include laboratory blood-chemistry studies of the pancreas, liver and gallbladder, blood-sugar tests, needle biopsy of the liver, exploratory abdominal surgery (laparotomy), X-rays of the abdomen, liver, gallbladder and blood vessels (angiography), and ultrasound and CT scan of the pancreas.
- Treatment will vary depending on overall health, spread of the cancer, and location and size of tumor.
- Psychotherapy or counseling is recommended to help adjust to incurable illness.
- Chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy.
- Surgery may be performed to remove the tumor, if it is small; relieve any bile-duct blockage and relieve or prevent bowel obstruction.
- Additional information available from the American Cancer Society, local branch listed in the telephone directory, or call (800) ACS-2345. Another source is the Cancer Information Clearinghouse at (800) 4-CANCER.

MEDICATIONS

- Antibiotics for coexisting infections.
- Pain relievers.
- Anticancer drugs.
- Pancreatic enzymes to replace those the pancreas cannot manufacture.
- Sedatives for sleep if needed.
- Antacids may be helpful.

ACTIVITY

Remain as active as your strength allows.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You have symptoms of pancreatic cancer.
- The following occur during treatment:
 - Fever and headache.
 - Muscle aches and fatigue.
 - Nausea and vomiting.
 - Severe abdominal pain and swelling.
 - Black, tarry stools.
- New, unexplained symptoms. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.