



The exact causes of pancreatic cancer are not yet well understood. Research studies have identified certain risk factors that may increase the likelihood that an individual will develop pancreatic cancer. The following describes some of these risk factors.

Family History

If a person's mother, father, sibling or child had pancreatic cancer, then that person's risk for developing the disease increases 2-3 times. The risk increases if a greater number of family members are affected. Also, the risk of pancreatic cancer increases if there is a history of familial breast, colon or ovarian cancer, familial melanoma or hereditary pancreatitis. Approximately 10 percent of pancreatic cancer cases are related to a family history of the disease.

Diabetes

Pancreatic cancer is more likely to occur in people who have long-standing diabetes (over 5 years). Research studies suggest that new-onset diabetes in people over the age of 50 may be an early symptom of pancreatic cancer. A sudden change in blood sugar levels in diabetics who previously had well-controlled diabetes may also be a sign of pancreatic cancer.

Chronic Pancreatitis and Hereditary Pancreatitis

People with chronic pancreatitis have an increased risk of developing pancreatic cancer. Chronic pancreatitis is common in individuals who consume large amounts of alcohol for many years. Hereditary pancreatitis causes recurrent episodes of inflammation of the pancreas that generally start by the time a person is 20 years old. The risk of developing pancreatic cancer is even higher in individuals who have hereditary pancreatitis.

Smoking

Smoking is a significant risk factor and may cause about 20-30 percent of all exocrine pancreatic

cancer cases. People who smoke cigarettes are 2 times more likely to develop pancreatic cancer than people who have never smoked.

Race (Ethnicity)

African-Americans have a higher incidence of pancreatic cancer than individuals of Asian, Hispanic or Caucasian descent. There is also a higher incidence of pancreatic cancer among Ashkenazi Jews, possibly due to a mutation involving the breast cancer gene (BRCA2) that is found in about 1 percent of individuals of this background.

Additional Factors That May Increase Risk:

- Being over 60 years of age
- Being male
- Consuming a diet high in red or processed meats
- Obesity

If you have any questions or would like more information about risk factors, please contact a Patient Central Associate toll-free at 877-2-PANCAN or email patientcentral@pancan.org.

Associates are available
Monday – Friday, 7 a.m. – 5 p.m., Pacific Time.