



After a Pancreatic Cancer Diagnosis



Pancreatic cancer is cancer that starts in the pancreas. The pancreas is an organ located behind your stomach. It helps digest food and control blood sugar. If you have been told you have pancreatic cancer, you've probably already had scans, blood tests, and a biopsy (a test that takes some tissue to check for cancer). Other tests might have been done on the cancer cells to check for certain proteins and gene changes called biomarkers. You might also have other procedures to find out if the cancer has spread. These tests help your doctor know what type of pancreatic cancer you have, what stage it is, and what treatment might help.

Treatment for pancreatic cancer

There are many ways to treat pancreatic cancer, including surgery. Your treatment will depend on the type and stage of your pancreatic cancer and where it is located. Your treatment options will also depend on the results of tests on the cancer cells, your health, and your personal preferences.

Surgery is usually done if the cancer can be removed safely. When a tumor is removed, a part of the pancreas is sometimes taken out also. It's rare for the entire pancreas to be removed. If the cancer has spread to other organs, they might also be taken out.

Other treatment can include ablation, radiation, and medicines such as chemo, targeted drug therapy, or immunotherapy. In many cases, more than one type of treatment is needed. Your doctor will help you decide which treatments are best for you.

Be sure to ask:

- What is the goal of treatment?
- What type of pancreatic cancer do I have?
- What stage is my pancreatic cancer, and what does that mean?
- What else have you learned from my test results?
- Will I need more tests?
- Will I need surgery? Can the cancer be removed completely?

What to expect before and during treatment

Your cancer care team will explain your treatment plan. This team may include different doctors, nurses, and other health care workers, depending on the type of treatment you need. For example, if you need radiation therapy, you will work with a radiation oncologist. They will tell you what to expect before, during, and after radiation treatment. If you need other types of treatment, your cancer care team will explain how it is given, help you get ready for it, keep track of how you're doing, and help you manage any side effects. You might also get blood tests, scans, or other tests at certain times to see how well your treatment is working.

Not everyone going through treatment for pancreatic cancer has the same side effects. For example, the side effects of surgery are different from the side effects of chemo, targeted drug therapy, immunotherapy, or radiation. And people getting the same treatment might have different side effects.

Be sure to ask:

- Do I need treatment besides surgery? What do you think is best for me and why?
- Are there any clinical trials for my type of cancer?
- What side effects might I have, and what can I do about them?
- How will we know if the treatment is working?
- How often will I get treatment? How long will it last?
- Where will I go to get treatment? Can I drive myself?
- Will I be able to keep doing my usual activities, like work and exercise?

What to expect after treatment

For many people, pancreatic cancer might not go away completely. They might continue to get treatment, and tests will still be needed to see how well it's working.

Tests might show that it's best for you to stop treatment or take a break. If so, you will have regular tests to check if your cancer has come back or if a new cancer has started in a different part of your body.

You might be faced with changes to your body after treatment. Part of your pancreas and other organs might need to be removed. This may change how your pancreas functions. You could have problems digesting food or controlling your blood sugar. You might need to test your blood sugar or take insulin or other medicines. Be sure to ask your doctor what to expect and if any other medicines are needed. And let your doctor know if you have any problems.

People who've had pancreatic cancer are at risk of having it again or getting certain other types of cancer. Even if you feel fine after finishing treatment, it's important to ask your cancer care team about a regular schedule for follow-up tests to check if your pancreatic cancer has come back.

Be sure to ask:

- Where do I get a copy of my treatment summary?
- How often do I need to see my cancer care team?
- When and how should I contact them?
- Will I need tests to see if my cancer has come back, or to check for problems from my treatment?
- Do I need any screening tests, like a mammogram or colonoscopy, to find other cancers early?
- Are there late or long-term side effects from treatment that I should watch for?
- Will I need to take insulin or eat a special diet?
- Where can I find my medical records after treatment?



For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/pancreaticcancer or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

Staying healthy

Be sure to tell your doctor or cancer care team if any treatment side effects don't go away or if you have any new symptoms.

There are things you can do to keep yourself healthy during and after treatment. Not smoking may help reduce your chance of pancreatic cancer. Getting to and staying at a healthy weight, eating well, being active, and avoiding alcohol can also help you stay healthy and lower your risk of getting a new pancreatic cancer or other cancers.

Dealing with your feelings

Having pancreatic cancer might make you feel scared, sad, or nervous. It's normal to have these feelings, and there are ways to help you cope with them.

- Don't try to deal with your feelings by yourself. Talk about them, no matter what they are.
- It's OK to feel sad or down once in a while, but let your cancer care team know if you have these feelings for more than a few days.
- If your doctor says it's OK, continue doing things you enjoy like spending time outdoors, going to a movie or sporting event, or going out to dinner.
- Get help with tasks like cooking and cleaning.

You might want to reach out to friends, family, or religious leaders or groups. Counseling can also help. Some people find it helpful to talk with others who've been through the same things. A support group can offer that. Tell your cancer care team how you're feeling. They can help you find the right support.