

Pancreatic Cancer - Risk Factors [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 11/2014

ON THIS PAGE: You will find out more about the factors that increase the chance of developing this type of cancer. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

A risk factor is anything that increases a person's chance of developing cancer. Although risk factors often influence the development of cancer, most do not directly cause cancer. Some people with several risk factors never develop cancer, while others with no known risk factors do. However, knowing your risk factors and talking about them with your doctor may help you make more informed lifestyle and health care choices.

A person with an average risk of pancreatic cancer has about a 1% chance of developing the disease. Generally, most pancreatic cancers (about 90%) are considered sporadic, meaning the genetic changes develop by chance after a person is born, so there is no risk of passing these genetic changes on to one's children. Inherited pancreatic cancers are less common (about 10%) and occur when gene mutations or changes are passed within a family from one generation to the next (see below). Often, the cause of pancreatic cancer is not known. However, the following factors may raise a person's risk of developing pancreatic cancer:

Age. The risk of developing pancreatic cancer increases with age. Most people who develop pancreatic cancer are older than 45; in fact, 90% are older than 55 and 70% are older than 65. However, adults of any age can be diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

Gender. More men are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer than women (see [Statistics](#) [3]).

Race/ethnicity. Black people are more likely than Asian, Hispanic, or white people to develop pancreatic cancer. People of Ashkenazi Jewish heritage are also more likely to develop pancreatic cancer (see [Family history](#), below).

Smoking [4]. Smokers are two to three times more likely to develop pancreatic cancer than nonsmokers.

Obesity [5] and **diet** [6]. Regularly eating foods high in fat is a risk factor for pancreatic cancer. Research has shown that obese and even overweight men and women have a higher risk of dying from pancreatic cancer.

Diabetes. Many studies have indicated that diabetes, especially when a person has had it for many years, increases the risk of developing pancreatic cancer. In addition, suddenly developing diabetes later in adulthood can be an early symptom of pancreatic cancer. However, it is important to remember that not all people who have diabetes or who develop diabetes as adults develop pancreatic cancer.

Family history. Pancreatic cancer may run in the family, called familial pancreatic cancer, if two or more first-degree relatives such as parents, brothers, sisters, or children are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Families with three or more close relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, grandchildren, or cousins who are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and with one relative diagnosed before age 50 are also considered to have familial pancreatic cancer. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) estimates that the risk of developing pancreatic cancer is increased four to five times for a person with one first-degree relative with pancreatic cancer, six to seven times for a person with two first-degree relatives, and 32 times for a person with three first-degree relatives with the disease.

It is important to talk with your family members about your family's history of pancreatic cancer. If you think you may have a family history of pancreatic cancer, talk with a [genetic counselor](#) [7] before you have any genetic testing. Genetic counselors are trained to explain the risks and benefits of genetic testing. There are specific registries for families with inherited pancreatic cancer syndromes and a genetic counselor can help you learn more about these.

Rare inherited conditions. Members of families with certain uncommon inherited conditions also have a significantly increased risk of pancreatic cancer, as well as other types of cancer; these include hereditary pancreatitis (see below), [Peutz-Jeghers syndrome \(PJS\)](#) [8], [familial malignant melanoma and pancreatic cancer \(FAMM-PC\)](#) [9], [hereditary breast and ovarian cancer \(HBOC\) syndrome](#) [10], and [Lynch syndrome](#) [11]. In addition, people who have [Li-Fraumeni syndrome \(LFS\)](#) [12] and [familial adenomatous polyposis \(FAP\)](#) [13] may have an increased risk of pancreatic cancer.

Chronic pancreatitis. Pancreatitis is the inflammation of the pancreas, a painful pancreatic disease. Some research suggests that having chronic pancreatitis may increase the risk of developing pancreatic cancer.

Hereditary pancreatitis. Hereditary pancreatitis (HP) is a condition associated with recurrent pancreatitis and an increased risk of pancreatic cancer. Learn more about [hereditary pancreatitis](#) [14].

Chemicals. Exposure to certain chemicals such as pesticides, benzene, certain dyes, and petrochemicals may increase the risk of developing pancreatic cancer.

Bacteria. A common bacterium called *Helicobacter pylori*, also called *H. pylori*, causes inflammation and ulcers in the stomach and increases the risk of stomach cancer. *H. pylori* also increases the risk of pancreatic cancer, although the risk is not as high as the risk of developing stomach cancer.

Hepatitis B infection. Hepatitis viruses are viruses that infect the liver. One study has shown

that a previous hepatitis B infection was twice as common in people with pancreatic cancer than in people without the cancer. More research is needed to learn more about this link.

Cirrhosis. Cirrhosis develops when liver cells are damaged and are replaced by scar tissue. Most cirrhosis in the United State is caused by alcohol abuse. Other causes are viral hepatitis (see above), too much iron in the liver from a disease called hemochromatosis, and some other rare types of chronic liver disease.

To continue reading this guide, use the menu on the side of your screen to select another section.

Links:

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/pancreatic-cancer/risk-factors>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19496>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25002>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25008>
- [6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24965>
- [7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24907>
- [8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19535>
- [9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18853>
- [10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18922>
- [11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19223>
- [12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19133>
- [13] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18852>
- [14] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18926>