

Pancreatic Cancer - Stages [1]

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

ON THIS PAGE: You will learn about how doctors describe a cancer's growth or spread. This is called the stage. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

Staging is a way of describing where the cancer is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting other parts of the body. Doctors use diagnostic tests to find out the cancer's stage, so staging may not be complete until all the tests are finished. Knowing the stage helps the doctor to decide what kind of treatment is best and can help predict a patient's prognosis, which is the chance of recovery. There are different stage descriptions for different types of cancer. For pancreatic cancer, it is important for the staging to be done at a center with experience in staging pancreatic cancer.

Doctors use several systems to stage pancreatic cancer. The method used to stage other cancers, called the TNM classification, is not often used for pancreatic cancer; however, for completeness, it is discussed below. The more common way to classify pancreatic cancer is to divide it into four categories based on whether it can be removed with surgery and where it has spread:

Resectable. This type of pancreatic cancer can be surgically removed. The tumor may be located only in the pancreas or extends beyond it, but it has not grown into important arteries or veins in the area. There is no evidence that the tumor has spread to areas outside of the pancreas. Approximately 10% to 15% of patients are diagnosed with this stage.

Borderline resectable. This category describes a tumor that may be difficult, or not possible, to remove surgically when it is first diagnosed, but if chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy is able to shrink the tumor first, it may be able to be removed later with negative margins, which means that no visible cancer cells are left behind.

Locally advanced. This type is still located only in the area around the pancreas, but it cannot be surgically removed because it has grown into nearby arteries or veins or to nearby organs. However, there are no signs that it has spread to any distant parts of the body. Approximately 35% to 40% of patients are diagnosed with this stage.

Metastatic. The tumor has spread beyond the area of the pancreas and to other organs, such as the liver or distant areas of the abdomen. Approximately 45% to 55% of patients are diagnosed

with this stage.

By classifying each cancer into one of these categories, the health care team can plan the best treatment strategy.

TNM Staging System

Doctors frequently use a tool called the TNM system to stage other types of cancer. Because doctors generally classify a tumor during surgery, and because many patients with pancreatic cancer do not receive surgery, the TNM system is not used as much for pancreatic cancer as it is for other cancers.

TNM is an abbreviation for tumor (T), node (N), and metastasis (M). Doctors look at these three factors to determine the stage of cancer:

- How large is the primary tumor and where is it located? **(Tumor, T)**
- Has the tumor spread to the lymph nodes? **(Node, N)**
- Has the cancer metastasized to other parts of the body? **(Metastasis, M)**

The results are combined to determine the stage of cancer for each person. There are five stages: stage 0 (zero) and stages I through IV (one through four). The stage provides a common way of describing the cancer, so doctors can work together to plan the best treatments. Here are more details on each part of the TNM system for pancreatic cancer:

Tumor. Using the TNM system, the "T" plus a letter or number (0 to 4) is used to describe the size and location of the tumor. This helps the doctor develop the best treatment plan for each patient. Specific tumor stage information listed below.

TX: The primary tumor cannot be evaluated.

T0: No evidence of cancer was found in the pancreas.

Tis: Refers to carcinoma in situ, which is very early cancer that has not spread.

T1: The tumor is in the pancreas only, and it is 2 centimeters (cm) or smaller in size.

T2: The tumor is in the pancreas only, and it is larger than 2 cm.

T3: The tumor extends beyond the pancreas, but the tumor does not involve the major arteries or veins near the pancreas.

T4: The tumor extends beyond the pancreas into major arteries or veins near the pancreas. A T4 tumor cannot be completely removed with surgery.

Node. The "N" in the TNM staging system is for lymph nodes. Lymph nodes are tiny, bean-shaped organs located throughout the body that help fight infection and disease as part of the body's immune system. In pancreatic cancer, regional lymph nodes are those lymph nodes near the pancreas and distant lymph nodes are those lymph nodes in other parts of the body.

NX: The regional lymph nodes cannot be evaluated.

N0: Cancer was not found in the regional lymph nodes.

N1: Cancer has spread to regional lymph nodes.

Distant metastasis. The "M" in the TNM system indicates whether the cancer has spread to other parts of the body.

MX: Distant metastasis cannot be evaluated.

M0: The disease has not spread to other parts of the body.

M1: Cancer has spread to another part of the body, including distant lymph nodes. Pancreatic cancer most commonly spreads to the liver, the lining of the abdominal cavity called the peritoneum, and lungs.

Cancer stage grouping

Doctors assign the stage of the cancer by combining the T, N, and M classifications.

Stage 0: Refers to cancer in situ, in which the cancer has not yet invaded outside the duct in which it started (Tis, N0, M0).

Stage IA: The tumor is 2 cm or smaller in the pancreas. It has not spread to lymph nodes or other parts of the body (T1, N0, M0).

Stage IB: A tumor larger than 2 cm is in the pancreas. It has not spread to lymph nodes or other parts of the body (T2, N0, M0).

Stage IIA: A tumor extends beyond the pancreas, but the tumor has not spread to nearby arteries or veins. It has not spread to any lymph nodes or other parts of the body (T3, N0, M0).

Stage IIB: A tumor of any size has not spread to nearby arteries or veins. It has spread to lymph nodes but not to other parts of the body (T1, T2, or T3; N1; M0).

Stage III: A tumor has spread to nearby arteries, veins, and/or lymph nodes but has not spread to other parts of the body (T4, N1, M0).

Stage IV: Any tumor that has spread to other parts of the body (any T, any N, M1).

Recurrent: Recurrent cancer is cancer that has come back after treatment. If there is a recurrence, the cancer may need to be staged again (called re-staging) using the system above.

Used with permission of the American Joint Committee on Cancer (AJCC), Chicago, Illinois. The original source for this material is the AJCC Cancer Staging Manual, Seventh Edition (2010) published by Springer-Verlag New York, www.cancerstaging.net [3].

Information about the cancer's stage will help the doctor recommend a treatment plan. The next section helps explain the treatment options for this type of cancer. Use the menu on the side of your screen to select Treatment Options, or you can select another section, to continue reading

this guide.

Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/pancreatic-cancer/stages>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancerstaging.net/>