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Chemotherapy After Surgery Lengthens Lives for Asian Patients with Pancreatic Cancer

In a new study in Japan, researchers found that patients with pancreatic cancer lived longer when they received chemotherapy with a drug called S-1 after surgery. This study included Japanese patients with stage I, II, or III pancreatic cancer who were able to have surgery to remove the tumor. In the United States, more than half of pancreatic cancers are diagnosed after the disease has spread beyond the pancreas. Because of this, only 20% to 30% of patients with pancreatic cancer are able to have surgery. Typically, patients who are able to have surgery are offered the drug gemcitabine (Gemzar) after the surgery to help lengthen their lives. In previous studies, researchers have found that this new drug, S-1, works as well as gemcitabine for Asian patients with pancreatic cancer. However, other studies have shown that S-1 may cause more harmful side effects in patients who are not Asian.

In this most recent study, 385 patients received either gemcitabine or S-1 after surgery. The researchers found that after two years, 70% of the patients who received S-1 were alive, compared with 53% of those who received gemcitabine. In addition, 51% of patients who received S-1 had their disease worsen within two years, compared with 71% of those who received gemcitabine.

What this means for patients

?Based on these results, we hope that guidelines in Japan for standard pancreatic cancer treatment after surgery will be changed to replace gemcitabine with S-1,? said lead author Katsuhiko Uesaka, MD, PhD, Medical Deputy Director at Shizuoka Cancer Center Hospital. S-1 is currently available in several Asian countries and most of Europe. Although it is not yet approved in the United States, a research study on using S-1 for stomach cancer is under way.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What type of cancer do I have, and what is the stage? What does this mean?
- What are my treatment options?
- What clinical trials are available to me?

For More Information

Guide to Pancreatic Cancer [1]

Clinical Trials [2]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/pancreatic-cancer
[2] http://www.cancer.net/all-about-cancer/clinical-trials