



PANCREATIC CANCER PREVENTION AND SCREENING

Cancer Prevention Series 11

Pancreas is a gland located in the abdomen. It secretes enzymes that help digestion and produces hormones that control blood-sugar levels. Pancreatic cancer occurs when abnormal cells in the pancreas grow out of control and invade into other tissues and organs.

Pancreatic cancer is an aggressive cancer. As the malignant pancreatic tumour grows slowly and is deep-seated, it is not easily detectable at the early stage.



Am I at risk of pancreatic cancer?

While it is not clear what causes pancreatic cancer, some risk factors identified are:

- Smoking
- Overweight or obesity
- Consumption of red or processed meat
- Heavy alcohol consumption
- Elderly males
- Family history of pancreatic cancer and carrier of certain inherited genes
- History of certain diseases (e.g. diabetes mellitus, chronic or hereditary pancreatitis)

What are the common symptoms of pancreatic cancer?

Pancreatic cancer may have no symptoms and the symptoms are hard to notice.

Common symptoms include:

- Yellowing of skin or eyes
- Dark-coloured urine
- Pale and greasy stool
- Pain in the abdomen or back
- Weight loss or loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Tiredness
- Blood clots in large vein, causing swelling and pain of leg due to deep venous thrombosis

You should consult a doctor as soon as possible if you develop any symptoms.

How to reduce the chance of getting pancreatic cancer?

- Do not smoke
- Avoid alcohol consumption
- Maintain a healthy body weight and waist circumference by being physically active and adopting a healthy eating pattern



Should I get screened for pancreatic cancer?

The purpose of cancer screening is to detect cancer before symptoms develop, so that early treatment can be initiated.

Based on the available international and local scientific evidence, the Government's Cancer Expert Working Group on Cancer Prevention and Screening has made the following recommendations on pancreatic cancer screening for the local population:

For persons at average risk

Screening for pancreatic cancer (including screening by tumour marker CA19-9) is **not recommended** in asymptomatic persons at average risk.

For persons at increased risk

There is currently insufficient evidence to recommend screening of pancreatic cancer for persons at increased risk by any standardised protocol. Persons at a significantly increased risk e.g. those with a strong family history or carry specific inherited genes may consider consulting doctors for an individual assessment.



Department of Health