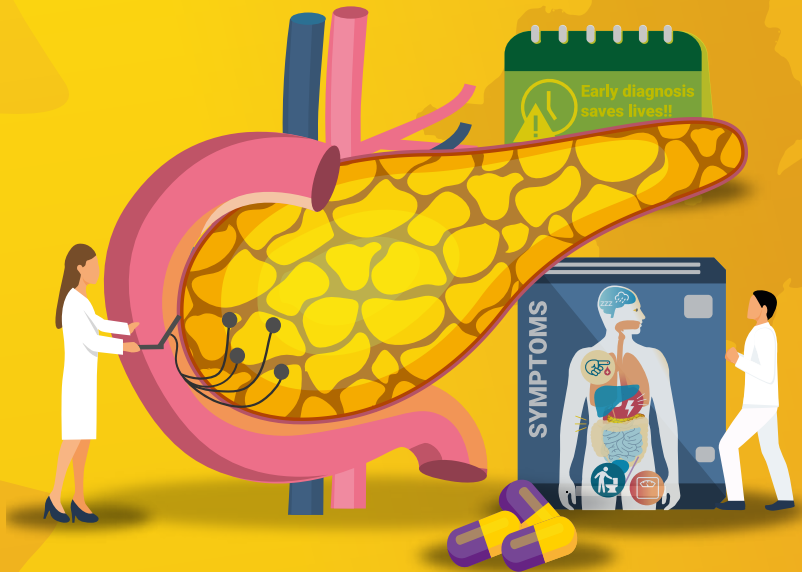


Understanding your diagnosis

What is pancreatic cancer and
what treatment might I need?



Pancreatic Cancer does not always follow the rules.

It is a secretive cancer that grows very quietly in the pancreas. Sometimes a cancer in the pancreas pretends to be another type of problem.

Some people do not have any symptoms at all until one day they wake up and look in the mirror and realise their skin or eyes have become yellow (jaundice). This is one of the reasons why it is so important speak to your GP if you have any troublesome symptoms that are not helped by medications.

We hope this leaflet will help you and your family understand what is happening when you are first told you may have pancreatic cancer.

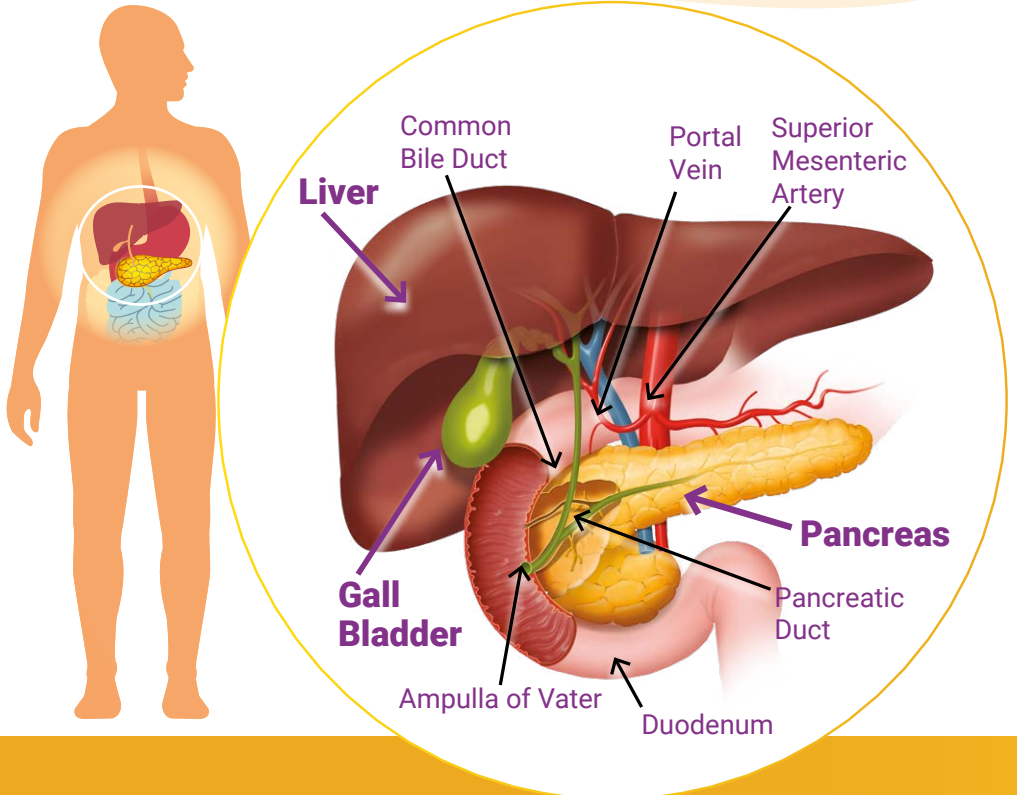
What is the Pancreas and what does it do?

The pancreas is shaped like a fish with a head, body and tail. It lies deep within the abdominal cavity, below the stomach and is tucked into the curve of the duodenum that forms the first part of the small bowel.

It can be harder to see the pancreas on normal scans and it can be difficult to get access to it with normal camera tests.

Two major functions of the pancreas:

- 1 Makes digestive enzymes that help you get the goodness out of your food.
- 2 Controls the level of sugar in your blood by producing insulin.



When there is a problem in the pancreas, it can affect both of these functions.

This may lead to:

- becoming **diabetic** or if you already have diabetes, you may notice your blood sugars are more difficult to control.
- **losing weight**
- your bowel motions are much **softer and lighter in colour**
- having a type of diarrhoea called **steatorrhea**.

Your pancreas is not making or releasing enzymes into your gut every time you eat.

As a result, your body can't absorb the important nutrients from your food. In this case you will need to take **Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement Tablets (PERT)**.



If you are having either of these problems, it would be very important to speak to your GP or a Specialist Nurse as soon as possible.

Some of the tests needed to gather more information

Specialist scans include:

- **Ultrasound scan**
- **CT Scan**
- **MRI**
- **CTPET**

If you have jaundice (yellow colouring of your skin and/or eyes), it's important to find out why and also to treat it.

An ERCP (Endoscopic Retrograde Cholangiopancreatography) is a special camera test performed in the Hospital. It helps the Doctor put a very fine tube called a stent into your bile duct to relieve the pressure from the tumour and allow the bile to flow freely.

However it does not remove the tumour in the pancreas.

EUS (Endoscopic Ultra Sound).

This is a special camera test performed in the Hospital. It helps the Doctor take a piece of tissue (biopsy) from the tumour in the pancreas to prove it is a cancer.



What is a Multi Disciplinary Meeting (MDM)

This meeting takes place every week in the Hospital. All the Doctors and Specialist Nurses involved in your care meet together to discuss the results of scans, camera tests and biopsies.

This helps the MDM team to decide on the best treatment for you.



Some of the names that are used:

Resectable

The tumour in the pancreas may be removed by an operation

Borderline resectable

The tumour is in the pancreas and is just a bit too big to remove without leaving any of it behind.

Locally advanced

The tumour has grown outside the pancreas around the major blood vessels that lie behind the pancreas. However, it has not spread to any other organ in the body such as the liver.

Metastatic pancreatic cancer

The cancer started in the pancreas and has moved to other parts of the body, for example your liver.

The different types of surgery

Depending on where the cancer is in your pancreas will determine the type of surgery you need.

Whipple

This surgery is named after Allen Whipple, an American surgeon, who pioneered pancreatic surgery in the mid 1930's. It is the name of the operation that removes cancer from the head of the pancreas.

During this operation the head of the pancreas, part of the duodenum, bile duct, stomach and all of the gallbladder are removed.

Distal Pancreatectomy and Splenectomy

This is the operation that removes cancer from the body and tail of the pancreas.

Usually the spleen is removed at the same time because it sits beside this part of the pancreas and the artery that connects to the spleen runs along the back of the body and tail of the pancreas.

Total Pancreatectomy

This is the operation that removes all of the pancreas - head, body and tail. This type of surgery is only carried out under exceptional circumstances as it can have a big impact on your overall health and lifestyle.

For example, it would mean that your blood sugars would be difficult to control and you would be dependent on insulin for the rest of your life.



Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy means the use of anti cancer drugs. It can be used for different reasons in the treatment of pancreatic cancer. These include:

Neoadjuvant chemotherapy

Drugs that are used to reduce the size of the tumour in the hope that it can be removed by an operation.

Adjuvant chemotherapy

Drugs that are used after you have had surgery to reduce the risk of the cancer coming back.

Palliative chemotherapy

Drugs that are used to slow down the growth of your cancer. However they will not take the cancer away.

Chemoradiotherapy

A combination of chemotherapy and radiotherapy that targets the tumour in the pancreas



More questions?

If you have any other questions or concerns or would like to speak to someone about what's happening to you please contact your GP or a Specialist Cancer Nurse.

The part you can play



Eat as well as you can.

Even if you don't have a very good appetite at the minute try to eat small meals more often.

Remember to speak to your GP or Specialist Nurse and ask if you need PERT



Exercise every day.

This could be going for a walk, using the stairs more often or doing some light gardening.

Whatever form of exercise you enjoy, its important to carry on doing it every day.



Rest for short times during the day.

Especially if you feel very tired. A good night's sleep every night is important. Speak to your GP or Specialist Nurse if you need help or advice about sleeping.



Talk to someone you trust.

Especially if you feel afraid or anxious. About how you are feeling deep inside.



Be Wise.

If you develop fever, a high temperature, jaundice or uncontrolled shaking or shivering it is very important you seek medical help immediately.



Be kind to yourself.

If you are experiencing pain, nausea and sickness, or any other troublesome symptoms please speak to your Doctor or Specialist Nurse as they will be able to help you.



NIPANC is a Northern Ireland charity working to improve the outcomes of pancreatic cancer by:

- **Increasing public understanding of this cancer**
- **Promoting awareness of the cancer's signs and symptoms by both medical professionals and members of the public**
- **Funding vital research**
- **Supporting patients and their families**

NIPANC has its roots in a group of people affected by pancreatic cancer coming together for support and to raise funds to promote better diagnosis and treatment for future patients.

The charity's work brings together families who have suffered losses from pancreatic cancer, families who are currently facing a diagnosis and survivors of the disease.

- ✉ info@nipanc.org
- 📘 [@NorthernIrelandPancreaticCancer](https://www.facebook.com/NorthernIrelandPancreaticCancer)
- 🐦 [@NIPANC_](https://twitter.com/NIPANC_)
- 📞 Support 07341 564923
- 📞 Fundraising 07341 564924

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NIPANC concentrates its research funding in Northern Ireland, working collaboratively with others charities to fund vital research and promote early diagnosis of the disease.

NIPANC gives a stronger voice to families affected by pancreatic cancer in Northern Ireland.

Together we will press for necessary priority to be given to early diagnosis; encourage and support research into the development of new and innovative treatments; and provide advice and support to patients and families affected by the disease.

If you and your family are currently affected by pancreatic cancer, please contact us for other support services that may be available to you through cancer charities.

