

# Recognizing the Early Signs of Pancreatic Cancer: A Comprehensive Guide

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## Perspective

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## DESCRIPTION

Pancreatic cancer is a disease that often goes undetected until it has progressed to an advanced stage. The initial symptoms of Pancreatic Cancer are not always obvious; they can be subtle and usually develop over time. Early pancreatic cancer frequently has no symptoms, so by the time many people become aware of any signs or symptoms or the disease is discovered by a doctor, the pancreatic cancer has frequently spread. A person may have different symptoms depending on the location, type, and stage of the cancer. A person may report gradual onset of nonspecific symptoms such as fatigue, weakness, nausea, and abdominal pain in the upper abdomen that spread around both sides to the back or back pain. Significant weight loss also may be seen when a person has no appetite or is unable to take inn nutrient from food when the pancreatic duct is obstructed, causing pancreatic exocrine insufficiency.

A delay in the diagnosis of pancreatic cancer is typical unless a doctor has reasons to suspect an underlying pancreatic cancer. This is because these initial symptoms can be readily misdiagnosed as other things and can even be brought on by other infections. Less than a third of person with pancreatic cancer are diagnosed within 2 months of the onset of their symptoms. Pain is the common presenting symptom in a person with pancreatic cancer. There is occasionally a link between pancreatic cancer and diabetes that developed during the last year or two.

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Pancreatic Cancer can occur in various parts of this small gland and can have somewhat different signs. Yellow eyes and skin, also known as painless obstructive jaundice, are the most typical symptoms of pancreatic cancer at the head of the pancreas. This is caused by the cancer blocking the bile duct where the duct enters the pancreas. Before the cancer becomes large enough to cause stomach pain, people with this symptom should consult a doctor. People usually notice a darkening of their urine and a lighter color to their bowel movements. Subtle to uncontrolled itching, called pruritus, may also occur when a person has obstructive jaundice. Diarrhea in the form of loose, watery, Oily, or foul smelling bowel movements can occur in some people. The diarrhea is caused by a lack of pancreatic enzymes available to help digest foods, particularly foods high in fat. The lack of pancreatic enzymes can be from the pancreas not being able to make enough enzymes can be from the pancreas not being able to make enough enzymes or from a blockage in the pancreas not allowing the enzymes to reach the small bowel to help with digestion.

For pancreatic cancers in the rest of the pancreas gland, known as the body and tail of the pancreas, symptoms that may be seen are indigestion, a decrease in appetite, nausea, subtle weight loss, and back pain. Pain on a person's left side may, along with weight loss, fatigue, and malaise, be a symptom of a cancer in the tail of the pancreas. Depression is reported to be more common in persons with pancreatic cancer than in persons with other abdominal cancers. In some persons, depression may be the most prominent presenting symptom. Blood clots in the legs or in the lungs may also occur with higher frequency in persons with pancreatic cancer. A person with advanced pancreatic cancer may also have ascites an enlarged liver from metastatic disease in the liver, or persistent back pain from the pancreatic cancer surrounding important blood vessels and nerves found behind the pancreas.

A number of tests may be carried out to help determine what is occurring in the pancreas if pancreatic cancer is suspected. Following a thorough physical examination and questions about your medical and family history, your doctor will perform these tests. Pancreatic cancer cannot be identified or diagnosed by a specific blood test. A person with obstructive jaundice usually has abnormal blood test results, including higher than normal bilirubin, alkaline phosphatase, and Gamma-Glutamyl Transpeptidase (GGT) levels. Other blood test results, such as the levels of pancreatic enzyme, are usually not abnormal in pancreatic cancer. A few number of people with pancreatic cancer present with acute pancreatitis in which elevated levels of amylase and lipase are seen.