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## What You Need To Know About™ Cancer of the Pancreas

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### Risk Factors

When you get a diagnosis of cancer, it's natural to wonder what may have caused the disease. Doctors can't always explain why one person gets pancreatic cancer and another doesn't. However, we do know that people with certain **risk factors** may be more likely than others to develop cancer of the pancreas. A risk factor is something that may increase the chance of getting a disease.

Studies have found the following risk factors for cancer of the pancreas:

- **Smoking:** Smoking tobacco is the most important risk factor for pancreatic cancer. People who smoke tobacco are more likely than nonsmokers to develop this disease. Heavy smokers are most at risk.
- **Diabetes:** People with diabetes are more likely than other people to develop pancreatic cancer.
- **Family history:** Having a mother, father, sister, or brother with pancreatic cancer increases the risk of developing the disease.
- **Inflammation of the pancreas:** **Pancreatitis** is a painful inflammation of the pancreas. Having pancreatitis for a long time may increase the risk of pancreatic cancer.
- **Obesity:** People who are overweight or obese are slightly more likely than other people to develop pancreatic cancer.

Many other possible risk factors are under active study. For example, researchers are studying whether a diet high in fat (especially animal fat) or heavy drinking of alcoholic beverages may increase the risk of pancreatic cancer. Another area of active research is whether certain **genes** increase the risk of disease.

Many people who get pancreatic cancer have none of these risk factors, and many people who have known risk factors don't develop the disease.

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