

Fact Sheet

Pancreatic Cancer

What is Pancreatic Cancer?

Abnormal change and growth of the cells of the pancreas can lead to a tumour that sometimes spreads to other parts of the body. The pancreas produces two chemicals called hormones (insulin and glucagon) that control blood sugar levels.

The risk factors of pancreatic cancer include tobacco use, diabetes, family history of disease, obesity and exposure to certain chemicals. Although this type of cancer is not common among Nunavummiut, it is important for those who are at risk of developing pancreatic cancer to consult with their health care providers.

What are the symptoms?

There are usually few symptoms during the early stages of pancreatic cancer. However, once a tumour starts to spread, signs and symptoms become more apparent. Some symptoms of pancreatic cancer include:

- Pain in the lower stomach or lower back that worsens when lying down
- Loss of appetite and unexplained weight loss
- Vomiting and nausea
- Indigestion and gas
- Fatigue and Weakness
- Diabetes

These signs and symptoms are also associated with other health conditions. Please contact your health care providers if you experience any of these symptoms.

What are the risk factors of pancreatic cancer?

- **Tobacco Use:** smoking, chewing tobacco and chewing snuff are the most important risk factor for pancreatic cancer. The risk of developing pancreatic cancer increases as the years of use and the number of cigarettes increase.
- **Age:** Individuals over 65 are at a greater risk of developing pancreatic cancer.
- **Exposure to chemicals:** individuals who are regularly exposed to dyes, petroleum compounds and solvents (10 years or more) are at a higher risk of developing pancreatic cancer.
- **Diabetes:** people who have a history of Type II diabetes (5-10 years) are at a higher risk of developing pancreatic cancer.
- **Family history:** a person with a parent, sibling or child is at a higher risk of developing pancreatic cancer. It also increases with the number of family members who have pancreatic cancer.
- **Obesity:** people who may have too much body fat or who may have an unhealthy weight are at greater risk of developing pancreatic cancer.

How can pancreatic cancer be prevented?

You can reduce your risk of developing pancreatic cancer by. ⁱⁱⁱ

- Quitting smoking and reducing tobacco consumption; this can help reduce the risk of developing pancreatic cancer.
- Maintaining a healthy diet and weight may also help reduce risk the risk of developing pancreatic cancer.
- Reducing your exposure to harmful chemicals as this too may help reduce the risk of developing pancreatic cancer.

ⁱ http://www.pancreaticcancer canada.ca/site/DocServer/Steven_Gallinger_report_April_23_2012.pdf?docID=1361

ⁱⁱ <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/pancreaticcancer/detailedguide/pancreatic-cancer-prevention>