

Understanding Risk Factors for Pancreatic Cancer

Approximately 1 in 64 American adults will be diagnosed with pancreatic cancer during their lifetime, but an individual's likelihood is highly dependent on different risk factors. Understanding your own level of risk and being proactive in making healthy behavioral changes when possible is one of the best ways to take charge against pancreatic cancer.



Age. The average age at time of a pancreatic cancer diagnosis is 70 years old, with the majority of patients over the age of 45.



Race. The incidence of pancreatic cancer in the U.S. is higher among Black Americans than any other racial or ethnic group. Black patients also tend to be diagnosed later and have higher mortality rates than other patient groups.



Familial history. A family history of pancreatic cancer diagnosis is one of the most impactful risk factors for developing the disease. People with 2 first-degree relatives who have pancreatic cancer are 6 times more likely to be diagnosed themselves, while those with 3 or more first-degree relatives diagnosed are 32 times more likely to have the disease.



Tobacco use. Smokers face approximately twice the risk of pancreatic cancer compared to never smokers. However, a person's risk of developing pancreatic cancer does decrease upon quitting, so quitting now can still have a meaningful impact on your risk if you currently smoke.



Diet and body weight. Individuals with a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher are about 20% more likely to develop pancreatic cancer, and weight gain during adulthood is particularly impactful. Additionally, high consumption of red and processed meats, saturated fats, and cholesterol may be associated with an increased risk of pancreatic cancer.



Heavy alcohol consumption. While research on the subject has found inconsistent results, there does appear to be a link between heavy drinking and pancreatic cancer risk, particularly among those who also smoke. This relationship is largely associated with an increased risk of chronic pancreatitis among heavy drinkers.

It's more important than ever to learn about your risk of pancreatic cancer and take appropriate action. Talk to your doctor for more information about pancreatic cancer and screening options.