

# Living with Pancreatic Cancer - A Quick Guide



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This is a brief summary of the information on 'Living with pancreatic cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

- Coping with pancreatic cancer
- Diet and pancreatic cancer
- Living with advanced pancreatic cancer
- Questions for your doctor
- Pancreatic cancer organisations

## Coping with pancreatic cancer

It can be very difficult coping with a diagnosis of cancer, both practically and emotionally. You may feel very upset and confused at first. As well as coping with the fear and anxiety that a diagnosis of cancer brings, you have to work out how to manage practically. There may be money matters to sort out. Who do you tell you have cancer? There may be children or grandchildren to consider.

The 'coping with cancer' section of CancerHelp UK contains lots of information you may find helpful. There are sections on

- Your feelings
- Talking to people: who and what to tell

- Talking to children
- How you can help yourself
- Who else can help you
- Sex and sexuality
- Coping financially including information about benefits and sick pay, mortgages, pensions, loans and insurance

## Diet and pancreatic cancer

Having cancer of the pancreas will affect your eating and drinking habits, whatever your stage or treatment. The pancreas is not only close to the stomach and bowel, it produces both insulin and enzymes which help to digest food.

After surgery, you may have digestive problems, such as diarrhoea. If you've had all or part of your pancreas removed, you may need to take insulin or tablets to regulate your blood sugar. You may also need to take enzyme supplements when you eat to help your digestion.

People with pancreatic disease often find it hard to digest fat. Before you leave hospital you should see a dietician, who will give you a diet plan to suit you. Generally the diet is based on keeping fat intake low and carbohydrate intake high. If you are on insulin or tablets to regulate your blood sugar, your doctor will also ask you to



check the sugar levels in your urine or blood.

You may find it easier to have lots of small meals, rather than sticking to 3 meals a day. If you are finding it hard to eat, there are plenty of diet supplements available on prescription. If you are having problems with diarrhoea after pancreatic surgery, avoid very high fibre foods (such as cereal and dried fruit). Tell your doctor or nurse. You may need some medication to control your symptoms.

### Living with advanced pancreatic cancer

Finding out that you have been diagnosed with an advanced cancer, or that your cancer has come back, can be devastating. At first, you are likely to experience a whirl of powerful emotions.

Advanced cancer means your cancer cannot be cured, although you may be offered treatment to try to slow your cancer down. You will need to talk very carefully to your own specialist to understand what the diagnosis means for you, what treatment is available, and how treatment may help you.

It is important that you feel as well as you possibly can. Ask your specialist, GP or hospital nurse about referral to a symptom control nurse. These are specialist nurses who can work with you and your doctor to help control your cancer symptoms and improve your well being.

CancerHelp UK has more information about living with advanced pancreatic cancer including

- Coping financially
- Finding information
- Questions you may find difficult to ask

### What to ask your doctor about living with pancreatic cancer

- How will my treatment affect me?
- Will I ever get back to normal, or will I have some long term effects?
- Will I be able to eat and drink normally?
- Will I need a special diet?
- How can I see a dietician?
- Will I be able to go back to work?
- Where can I get help with claiming benefits and grants?
- What practical help is available?
- Why did this happen to me?
- Are my children at risk of getting cancer of the pancreas?
- Where can I get help dealing with my feelings?
- Can you refer me for counselling?
- Do I have to pay for counselling?
- Could you refer me to a Macmillan nurse?

If you have an advanced cancer:

- Why can't my cancer be cured?
- What symptoms am I likely to have?
- What help can I have with controlling symptoms?
- Will I be in pain?
- What pain control can you offer?
- How will I die?
- How long do I have left to live?



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## Pancreatic cancer organisations

Cancer Research UK  
Main website: [www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)  
Patient information website:  
<http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>  
Cancer Information Nurses phone: 020  
7061 8355

Pancreatic Cancer UK  
Website:  
<http://www.pancreaticcancer.org.uk>

Diabetes UK  
Phone: 020 7424 1000  
Website: [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)  
Email: [info@diabetes.org.uk](mailto:info@diabetes.org.uk)

### More information

For more information about pancreatic cancer, visit our website  
<http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for cancer trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040** 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday

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Adapted from Cancer Research UK's Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in March 2011. CancerHelp UK is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through CancerHelp UK and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. © Cancer Research UK 2011. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464) and in Scotland (SC041666).