

What is pancreatic cancer?

This fact sheet explains the pancreas and what it does. It also explains what pancreatic cancer is.

If you are at all worried about pancreatic cancer, speak to your doctor.



You can also speak to our specialist nurses on our confidential Support Line about any questions you have about pancreatic cancer. You can call them free on **0808 801 0707** or email **nurse@pancreaticcancer.org.uk**

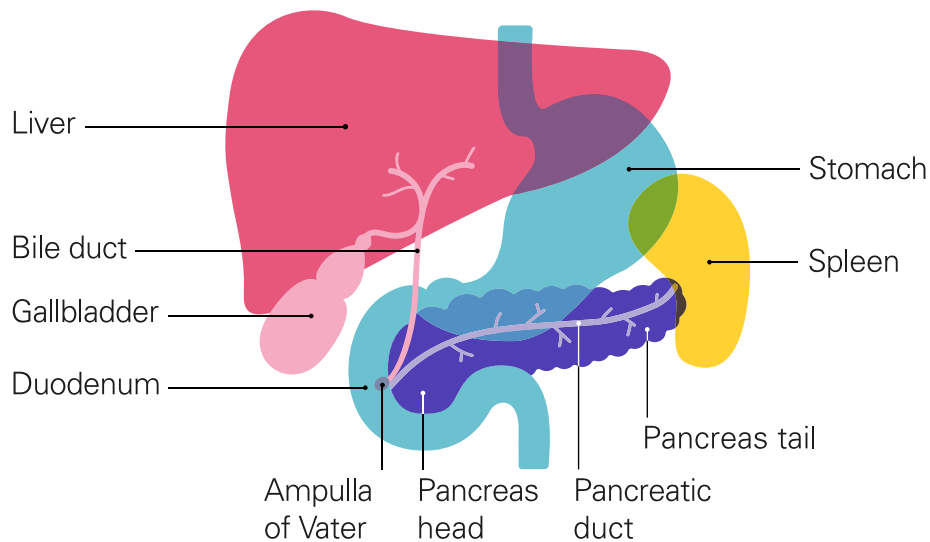
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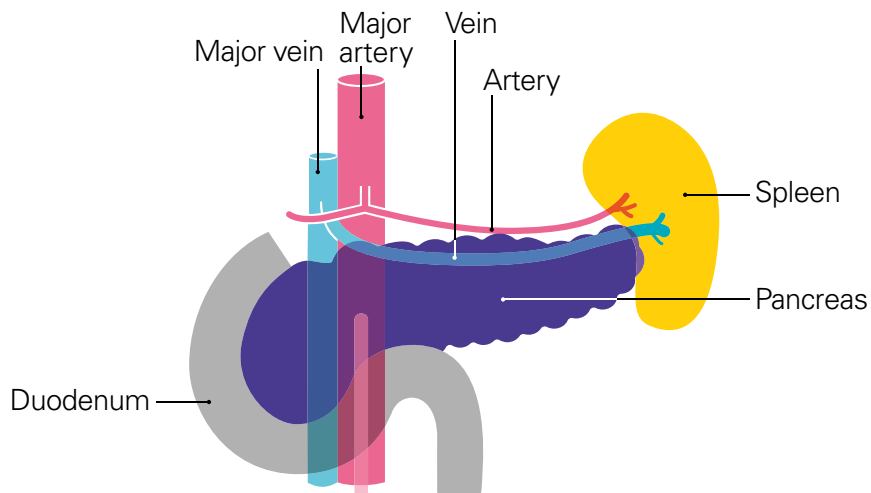
What is the pancreas?

The pancreas is a gland that sits behind your stomach, at the back of your tummy (abdomen). Everyone has a pancreas (unless it has been removed). The pancreas is often described as having a head, body and tail. It is surrounded by several important organs, such as the liver, and also by large blood vessels and lymph nodes (part of your immune system).

The pancreas and surrounding organs



The pancreas and surrounding blood vessels



Your pancreas does two main things.

- It makes enzymes. Enzymes help to break down food so your body can absorb the nutrients from it. This is part of digestion.
- It makes hormones, including insulin, which control sugar levels in the blood.

Pancreatic cancer can affect how well your pancreas works. You may have problems digesting your food and controlling sugar levels in your blood.

What is pancreatic cancer?

Pancreatic cancer develops when cells in the pancreas grow out of control, forming a lump. You might hear this called a tumour or mass.

There are different types of pancreatic cancer.

- Pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma is the most common type.
- Neuroendocrine cancers are less common – they behave differently and are treated differently.



You can read more about the different types of pancreatic cancer on our website: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/types**

Read about the symptoms of pancreatic cancer at: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/symptoms**

Read about how pancreatic cancer is diagnosed in our fact sheet: **[How is pancreatic cancer diagnosed?](#)**

Or at: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/diagnosis**

If you have any questions or concerns about pancreatic cancer, speak to your doctor.



You can also speak to our specialist nurses on our Support Line with any questions about pancreatic cancer.

More information and support

Pancreatic Cancer UK services

We are here for everyone affected by pancreatic cancer.

Our specialist nurses are here to talk now

If your world has been turned upside down by a pancreatic cancer diagnosis, we are here to talk now. We can answer your questions, recommend practical steps and provide the emotional support you and those close to you need, when you need it most.

Call free on **0808 801 0707** or email **nurse@pancreaticcancer.org.uk**

Expert information

Our free information covers everything about pancreatic cancer to help you understand the cancer, ask questions and make decisions.

Go to: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/information**

Download or order our free publications at **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/publications** or call **0808 801 0707**

Our online forum

The forum is a supportive online space where everyone affected by pancreatic cancer can be there for each other at any time.

Go to: **forum.pancreaticcancer.org.uk**

Our online support sessions

Our online support sessions are hosted by our specialist pancreatic cancer nurses and will give you the chance to connect with others who have also been diagnosed.

Go to: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/supportsessions**

Real life stories

Read other people's experiences of pancreatic cancer to find out how they coped with their diagnosis and treatment and their tips on looking after themselves.

Go to: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/stories**

Useful organisations

Cancer Research UK

cancerresearchuk.org

Helpline: 0808 800 4040 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm)

Information for anyone affected by cancer.

Healthtalk

healthtalk.org

Personal experiences presented in written, audio and video formats, including people talking about pancreatic cancer.

Macmillan Cancer Support

macmillan.org.uk

Support Line: 0808 808 00 00 (7 days a week, 8am-8pm)

Provides practical, medical and financial support for anyone affected by cancer, including family members.

Maggie's

maggies.org

Tel: 0300 123 1801

Centres around the UK and online offer free, comprehensive support for anyone affected by cancer.

Neuroendocrine Cancer UK

neuroendocrinecancer.org.uk

Helpline: 0800 434 6476 (Tues-Thurs 10am-4pm)

Information and support for people with neuroendocrine cancers (neuroendocrine tumours or NETs).

This fact sheet has been produced by the Support and Information Team at Pancreatic Cancer UK.

We make every effort to make sure that our services provide up-to-date, accurate information about pancreatic cancer. We hope this will add to the medical advice you have had, and help you make decisions about your treatment and care. This information should not replace advice from the medical team – please speak to your doctor, nurse or other members of your medical team about any questions.

Email us at **publications@pancreaticcancer.org.uk** for references to the sources of information used to write this fact sheet.

Give us your feedback

We are always keen to improve our information, so let us know if you have any comments. Email us at **publications@pancreaticcancer.org.uk** or write to our Information Manager at the address below.

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