

# Pancreatic Cancer U K

## A-Z of medical words

This page explains some of the medical words that you may hear when you are finding out about pancreatic cancer and how it is treated.

### **Absorption**

Once your food has been broken down, the nutrients are absorbed into the blood so that they can be used by the body. This is called absorption.

### **Adjuvant**

Adjuvant treatment is given alongside or after the main treatment. This may be adjuvant chemotherapy or radiotherapy given after surgery. Or it may be pain relief that is given alongside painkillers to help manage any pain.

### **Advanced pancreatic cancer**

Advanced pancreatic cancer is cancer that has spread from the pancreas to other parts of the body, such as the lungs or liver. It is not possible to remove the cancer with surgery. Advanced cancer is also known as metastatic cancer.

### **Ampulla of Vater**

The Ampulla of Vater is the area where the pancreatic duct and the bile duct meet at the duodenum. This is also known as the hepatopancreatic ampulla.

### **Analgesic**

An analgesic is a medicine that relieves pain.

### **Ascites**

Ascites is a build-up of fluid in the tummy. It may cause swelling and you may feel full quicker when you eat. It can also cause pain and discomfort.

### **Bile**

Bile is a fluid which helps digestion. It is produced by the liver and stored in the gall bladder.

### **Bile duct**

The bile duct is a tube that carries bile from the liver to the duodenum (small intestine).

## **Bilirubin**

Bilirubin is a yellow substance that is found in bile. It is the waste product of the normal break down of old red blood cells. If there is a build-up of bilirubin in the blood, you may develop jaundice.

## **Biopsy**

A biopsy is a test that removes small tissue samples to examine under a microscope. A biopsy is the only way of being absolutely certain that you have pancreatic cancer.

## **Borderline resectable pancreatic cancer**

Borderline resectable pancreatic cancer is cancer that has grown very close to the major blood vessels near the pancreas. It may be possible to remove the cancer, but it depends which blood vessels are affected and how far the cancer has grown.

## **Bypass surgery**

If pancreatic cancer is blocking the bile duct or the duodenum, bypass surgery may be used to relieve the blockage. This can treat symptoms such as jaundice or being sick.

## **Cachexia**

Cachexia is a loss of fat and muscle in people with long term illnesses, such as cancer.

## **Coeliac plexus nerve block**

A nerve block is a treatment that blocks nerves from sending messages to the brain. It can be used to treat pain. You may be able to have a nerve block in the coeliac plexus, which is a bundle of nerve behind the pancreas.

## **Chemoradiotherapy**

Chemoradiotherapy is a treatment that uses chemotherapy together with radiotherapy.

## **Chemotherapy**

Chemotherapy is a treatment that uses anti-cancer drugs to destroy cancer cells.

## **Constipation**

Constipation is problems emptying your bowels. Poo may be hard, dry and difficult to pass.

## **CT scan**

A CT (computerised tomography) scan uses x-rays to create a 3D picture of the pancreas and the organs around it. It is used to diagnose pancreatic cancer.

## **Diarrhoea**

Diarrhoea is runny poo.

## **Diet**

Your diet is the food you eat. When we talk about symptoms or problems around diet, we mean problems that can affect your eating and digestion. We are not talking about the kind of diet people often go on to help them lose weight.

## **Dietitian**

A dietitian is a health professional who provides expert advice about diet and nutrition, including how to manage symptoms relating to digesting food.

## **Digestion**

Digestion is what your body does to break down your food to get the nutrients out of it.

## **Duodenum**

The duodenum is the first part of the small intestines. It absorbs nutrients and water from food that is passing out of the stomach.

## **Enzymes**

Enzymes are substances that are made by different parts of the body, including the pancreas. Different types of enzymes have different roles in the body. Pancreatic enzymes help break down food.

## **Endoscopic retrograde cholangio-pancreatography (ERCP)**

An ERCP is a test that is used to diagnose problems with the pancreas. It is used if your bile duct is blocked, to put in a small tube called a stent into the bile duct to unblock it.

## **Endoscopic ultrasound scan (EUS)**

An EUS is a test used to diagnose pancreatic cancer. A thin, flexible tube (called an endoscope) is passed through your mouth and down into your stomach. The tube has a light at the end and a small ultrasound probe to create pictures of the pancreas.

## **FDG-CT/PET scan**

This scan combines a CT scan with a PET (positron emission tomography) scan to build up a clearer picture of the cancer and how it is behaving. It can be used to learn more about the stage of the cancer and how best to treat it.

## **Gastroenterologist**

A gastroenterologist is a doctor that specialises in diseases and disorders of the digestive system, including the stomach, intestines, liver and pancreas.

## **Genes**

Genes carry the information that controls our growth and how our bodies work. Occasionally, there may be changes in genes which means that someone is more likely to get a disease. This type of change in a gene is often called a fault or mutation.

## **Glucose**

Glucose is the sugar found in foods and drinks. Our body turns all carbohydrates that we eat into glucose, and uses it as energy.

## **Hepatobiliary**

Hepatobiliary is a term covers the liver, gall bladder and bile ducts. These are very close to the pancreas, and hepatobiliary (HPB) doctors and nurses may specialise in treating pancreatic diseases as well.

## **Hereditary pancreatitis**

Pancreatitis is an inflammation of the pancreas. Hereditary pancreatitis is a rare type of pancreatitis that runs in families. People with hereditary pancreatitis have a much higher risk of developing pancreatic cancer.

## **Hormones**

Hormones are chemical messages made by your body. They are carried in your blood and affect different processes in your body.

## **Insulin**

Insulin is a hormone that is produced by the pancreas. It helps to control blood sugar (glucose) levels.

## **Jaundice**

Jaundice is a symptom of pancreatic cancer. It develops when there is a build-up of bilirubin in the blood. It causes yellow skin and eyes, dark urine and itchy skin.

## **Laparoscopy**

A laparoscopy is a small operation that is sometimes used to confirm a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, and to check whether the cancer can be removed by surgery.

## **Localised pancreatic cancer**

Localised pancreatic cancer is cancer that is contained in the pancreas. It's the earliest stage of pancreatic cancer and it is possible to remove the cancer with surgery. It is also known as early or resectable pancreatic cancer.

## **Locally advanced pancreatic cancer**

Locally advanced pancreatic cancer is cancer that has spread to structures around the pancreas, such as blood vessels, stomach or spleen.

## **Lymph nodes**

Lymph nodes are small oval structures throughout the body that contain lymph fluid. They are part of the immune system.

## **Magnetic resonance cholangio-pancreatography (MRCP)**

An MRCP is a type of MRI scan. It gives a clear picture of the bile duct or pancreatic duct and any blockages in them.

## **Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan**

An MRI scan uses magnets and radio waves to build up detailed pictures of the pancreas and surrounding areas.

## **Nutrients**

Nutrients are things you get from your food that you need to be healthy. They include proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals.

## **Nutritional supplements**

Nutritional supplements are specially formulated drinks, powders and foods that help to increase your calorie intake and help you to gain weight.

## **Oncologist**

An oncologist is a doctor who is an expert in treating cancer. A medical oncologist is an expert on drug treatments, and a clinical oncologist also manages radiotherapy treatment.

## **Opioid painkillers**

Opioid painkillers are strong painkillers such as morphine. They are used to treat moderate and severe pain.

## **Palliative care**

Palliative care helps people live as well as possible for as long as possible if their cancer can't be cured. It manages complex symptoms such as pain, as well as providing emotional, practical and spiritual support. It's not just for people in the final stages of life.

## **Pancreatic duct**

The pancreatic duct is the small tube that carries pancreatic juices (which contain pancreatic enzymes), from the pancreas to the duodenum.

## **Pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy (PERT)**

PERT is used if the pancreas isn't producing enough enzymes to digest your food. It involves taking pancreatic enzyme supplements to help break down food.

## **Pathology**

Pathology is an examination of tissue and cells under a microscope. A pathologist is a doctor specialising in pathology.

## **Pylorus-preserving pancreaticoduodenectomy.**

This is a type of surgery to remove pancreatic cancer. The procedure is similar to the Whipple's operation, but none of the stomach is removed.

## **Radiologist**

A radiologist is a doctor specialising in using x-rays to diagnose and treat disease.

## **Radiotherapy**

Radiotherapy uses high-energy x-rays (radiation) to destroy cancer cells.

## **Resectable pancreatic cancer**

Resectable pancreatic cancer is cancer that is contained in the pancreas and can be removed by surgery. It is also known as early or localised pancreatic cancer.

### **Small intestine**

The small intestine is part of the bowel, where food is digested and absorbed. The duodenum is the first part of the small intestine.

### **Stage**

The stage of cancer describes the size of the cancer and whether it has spread. The stage of pancreatic cancer is used to decide what the best treatment option is.

### **Steatorrhea**

Steatorrhea is caused by fat in poo. Poo may be large, pale, look oily, smell horrible, and be difficult to flush down the toilet. It can be a symptom of pancreatic cancer.

### **Stent**

A stent is a small, hollow tube. If you have pancreatic cancer, you may have a stent put into your bile duct (a biliary stent) or your duodenum (a duodenal stent) to relieve any blockages. This can help relieve symptoms of jaundice or sickness.

### **Stools**

Stools is another word for poo. It is also called faeces or bowel motions.

### **Supportive care**

Supportive care teams provide similar services to palliative care teams. They help people who have cancer that can't be cured live as well as possible for as long as possible. They help people to cope with their condition and its treatment.

### **Unresectable pancreatic cancer**

Unresectable pancreatic cancer is cancer that has spread outside the pancreas, to areas such as blood vessels, the stomach or the spleen. It is not possible to remove the cancer with surgery.

### **Upper gastrointestinal**

The upper part of the digestive system is called the upper gastrointestinal area. It includes the oesophagus (the tube between the throat and stomach), stomach, liver, pancreas, gall bladder and bile ducts. It is often shortened to upper GI.

### **Whipple's operation**

The Whipple's operation is one of the most common types of surgery for pancreatic cancer. The surgeon will remove the head of the pancreas, the duodenum, the gall bladder and part of the stomach.