

Pancreatic Cancer: Treatment Choices



Various types of treatment can be used for pancreatic cancer. Which may work best for you? It depends on a number of factors. These include the size, location, and stage of your cancer. Factors also include your age, overall health, and what side effects you'll find acceptable.

Learning about your treatment choices

You may have questions and concerns about your treatment choices. You may also want to know how you'll feel and function after treatment, and if you'll have to change your normal activities.

Your healthcare provider is the best person to answer your questions. They can tell you what your treatment choices are, how successful they're expected to be, and what the risks and side effects are. Your healthcare provider may suggest a specific treatment. Or they may offer more than one, and ask you to decide which you'd like to use. It can be hard to make this decision. It's important to take the time you need to make the best decision.

Deciding on the best plan may take some time. Talk with your healthcare provider about how much time you can take to explore your choices. You may want to get another opinion before deciding on your treatment plan. You also may want to include your family and friends in this process.

Understanding the goals of treatment for pancreatic cancer

For some pancreatic cancers, the goal of treatment is to cure the cancer. If cure isn't possible, treatment may be used to shrink the cancer or keep it under control for as long as possible. Treatment can also improve your quality of life by helping to control the symptoms of the disease. The goals of treatment can be one or more of these things:

- Remove or destroy the cancer in your pancreas
- Remove or destroy tumors in other parts of your body
- Stop or slow the growth or spread of pancreatic cancer cells
- Prevent or delay the cancer from coming back
- Ease symptoms caused by the cancer. These can include pain or pressure on your organs.

Types of treatment for pancreatic cancer

Many types of treatment can be used for pancreatic cancer. Different combinations of treatment may be used. These depend on a number of factors, such as:

- The size of the cancer and where it is
- The stage (extent) of the cancer
- Your age and overall health
- Your personal concerns and preferences

Surgery

This is often the preferred treatment for early stage pancreatic cancer if it can be done. This is because it may cure the cancer. But in most cases, pancreatic cancer has spread too far to be removed completely. If the

cancer can't be removed, your healthcare provider might still suggest a less extensive surgery to ease symptoms.

Radiation therapy

This treatment is often used with chemotherapy (chemo), either before or after surgery. Radiation and chemo before surgery can help shrink a tumor and make it easier to take out. After surgery, radiation and chemo can be used to try to kill any cancer cells that are left. Radiation may also be used as part of the main treatment in people who can't have surgery. Or it may be used to help ease symptoms in people with advanced cancer.

Chemotherapy

Chemo uses strong medicines to kill cancer cells. For pancreatic cancer, chemo may be used before or after surgery (often with radiation). Or it may be the main treatment for people who can't have surgery.

Targeted therapy

These medicines target specific parts of cancer cells that help the cancer grow and spread. Targeted therapy medicines work differently from standard chemo medicines, and they have different side effects. They may be used along with chemo in some cases.

Immunotherapy

These medicines help your immune system find and kill cancer cells. These medicines may be used if pancreatic cancer comes back, can't be treated with surgery, or has spread.

Supportive care

Your healthcare provider may suggest treatments that help ease your symptoms, but don't treat the cancer. For instance, you may need treatment to help with nausea or pain. These can be used along with other treatments. Your provider may suggest you get only supportive care if they believe that the available cancer treatments are more likely to do you more harm than good.

Clinical trials for new treatments

Researchers are always looking for new and better ways to treat pancreatic cancer. These new methods are tested in clinical trials, a type of research study. Talk with your healthcare provider to find out if there are any clinical trials you should consider.

Talking with your healthcare provider

At first, thinking about treatment choices may seem overwhelming. Talk with your healthcare team and loved ones. Make a list of questions. Consider the benefits and possible side effects of each choice. Talk about your concerns with your healthcare provider before making a decision.

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