Pancreatic Adenocarcinoma Symptoms and Risk Factors



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Common Signs and Symptoms

Abdominal Pain
Abdominal Pain-bolt
Abdominal pain is one of the most common presenting signs of pancreatic cancer, however it is very non-specific.

Anorexia and Weight Loss
Anorexic-rex
One sign of pancreatic carcinoma is epigastric pain with weight loss, which is a non-specific sign common to many malignancies.

Migratory Superficial Thrombophlebitis
Migrating trombone-flamingos and super-fish
Migratory superficial thrombophlebitis, also known as Trousseau's syndrome, is characterized by recurrent thromboses of the superficial venous system. This is likely a reflection of the hypercoagulable state, and tends to present later in the disease course.

New-Onset Diabetes
Dyed-beads pancreas
New onset diabetes in a patient over 50 may be associated with pancreatic cancer. In fact, 50% of patients diagnosed with pancreatic adenocarcinoma have diabetes at the time of diagnosis, and patients with newly diagnosed diabetes after age 50 have 8 times the risk of developing pancreatic adenocarcinoma.

Signs/Symptoms Specific to Tumors in the Pancreatic Head

Jaundice
Jaundice janitor
Pancreatic cancers arising near the head of the pancreas may result in obstructive jaundice due to the inability to effectively excrete bilirubin.

Steatorrhea
Steak-diarrhea
Steatorrhea, or fatty/oily stool, is a presenting sign that is commonly associated with pancreatic adenocarcinomas localized to the head of the pancreas. This is because tumors in the head of the pancreas may obstruct the secretion of bile, which contains bile salts that aid in the emulsion and digestion of fats.

White Stool
White stool
Cancers that arise in the head of the pancreas may cause white stool due to obstruction of the common bile duct, leading to decreased entry into the intestine by bile, which gives stool its pigment.

Palpable but Non-tender Gall Bladder
Purple-Paw on Gallbladder with no-pain sign
Pancreatic carcinomas that arise near the head of the pancreas may present with palpable gall bladder (due to biliary obstruction).

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Risk Factors

Elderly

Old lady

Pancreatic carcinoma is most common in the elderly (>70).

Chronic Pancreatitis

Old crone holding flaming pancreas

Chronic pancreatitis, which itself has many risk factors such as alcoholism, is a common risk factor associated with pancreatic adenocarcinoma.

Smoking

Risk factor: Smoking

Smoking is a well-known risk factor for development of pancreatic adenocarcinoma.

Alcoholism

Alcoholic-martini

Chronic alcohol abuse has been shown to be linked to increase risk of pancreatic adenocarcinoma. This may be related to its association with chronic pancreatitis.

Diabetes

Dyed-beads necklace

Diabetes is a well-studied risk factor that can increase one's predisposition to developing pancreatic adenocarcinoma. The exact mechanism is unclear, though it has been hypothesized that increased risk of pancreatic cancer in patients with diabetes may be related to reduced plasma adiponectin, which is a fat-derived hormone that induces insulin sensitivity and has anti-inflammatory action.

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