



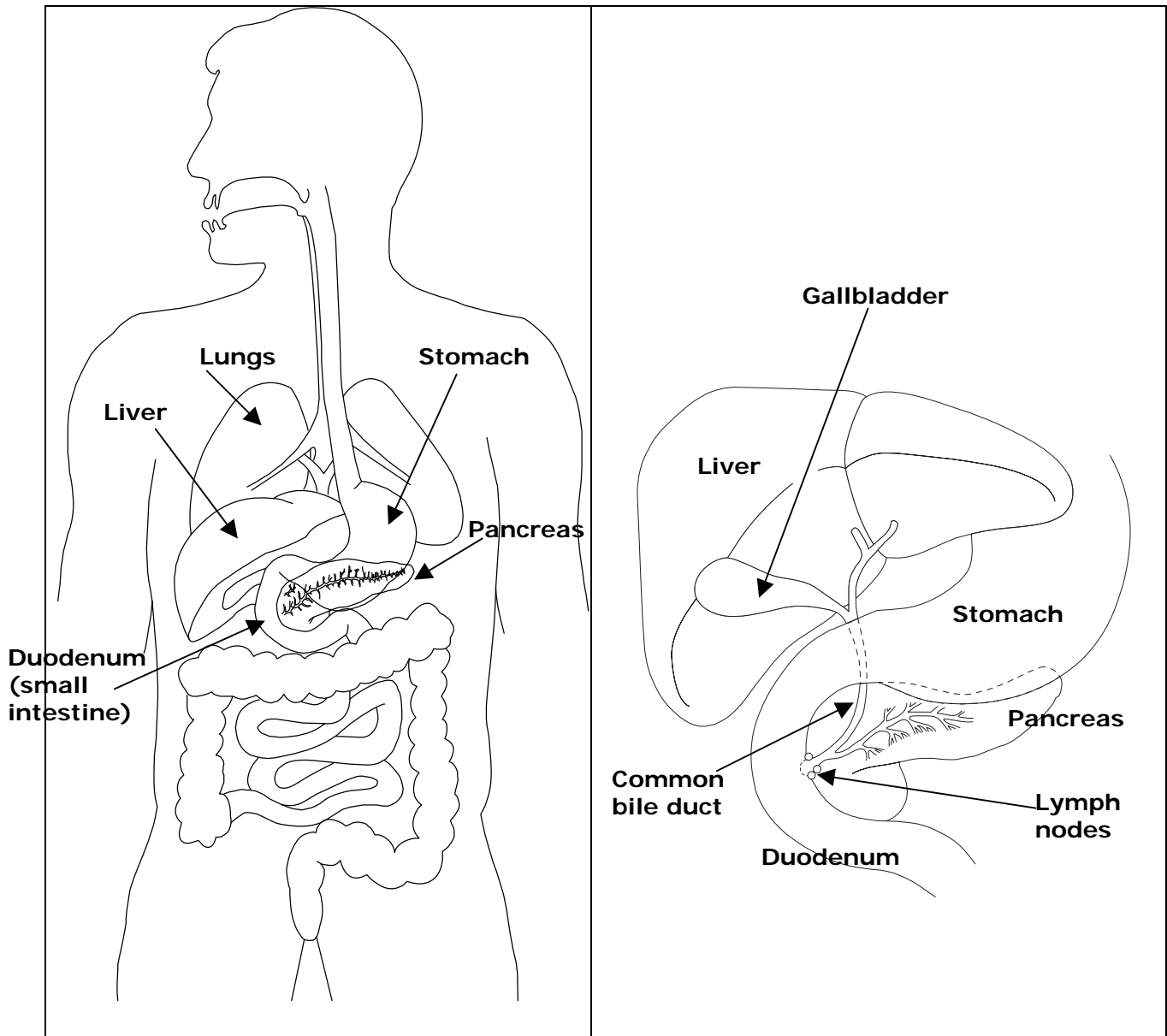
Pancreatic Cancer

Information for patients and their families

This handout answers common questions that are often asked by our patients and families. The information in this booklet is what we talked about today at your first appointment. You may have more questions and concerns. Please let us know how we can help you.

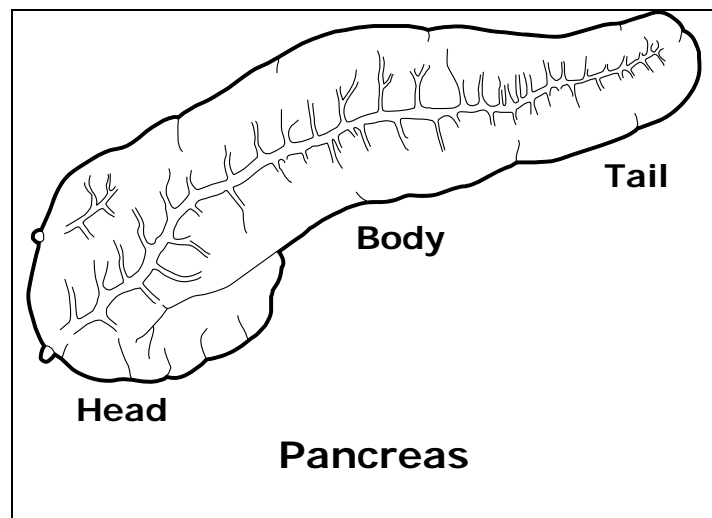
Where is the pancreas and what does it do?

The pancreas is a large gland that lies across the back of your abdomen. It hides behind the stomach.



The pancreas makes special juices or enzymes that help breakdown and digest your food. The pancreas also makes the hormones insulin and glucagon. These hormones keep your sugar level balanced.

The head of the pancreas is the widest part of the organ. Most pancreatic cancer tumours occur in the head of the pancreas.



How do I know I have pancreatic cancer?

Pancreatic cancer is hard to find. Pancreatic cancer grows into a tumour. A small piece of the tumour is checked to see if there is cancer. This is called a biopsy. Sometimes, the biopsy does not find or detect cancer so other tests such as a CT scan and blood tests are helpful in finding out if you have cancer.

What does the stage of cancer mean?

The stage of cancer tells us how much of the cancer is in your body. The stage tells us if the cancer has spread. Knowing the stage helps us plan your treatment. The higher the stage, the more the cancer has spread.

Stage 1	The tumour is less than 2 cm and is just in the pancreas.
Stage 2	The cancer is only in the pancreas but bigger than 2 cm.
Stage 3	Cancer has spread to the lymph nodes near the pancreas.
Stage 4	The cancer involves major blood vessels around the pancreas. It cannot be removed by surgery. The cancer may have spread to other parts of the body, such as the liver, lungs or elsewhere.

Is there a cure for pancreatic cancer? What is the treatment for pancreatic cancer?

The only cure for pancreatic cancer is surgery to remove the tumour and the tissue around it.

Not all patients with pancreatic cancer will be able to have surgery. Only about 15 to 20 people out of a 100 will be able to have surgery.

Even if you do have surgery, there may be other additional treatment options. These options may include radiation and/or chemotherapy. You may be offered an option to join a research study (clinical trial).

Even though a pancreatic cancer tumour is removed by surgery, it may come back. If pancreatic cancer comes back you may need chemotherapy and/or radiation.

What does chemotherapy involve?

Chemotherapy is using drugs to kill cancer cells. You will receive your chemotherapy here at the JCC. Chemotherapy is given in an area that is called the Chemo Suite on Level 2. You do not need to stay overnight.

Before you start on chemotherapy there is a chemotherapy teaching class that we want you to attend. During the class you will learn more about chemotherapy, how it is given and how to take care of yourself. You may be nervous about the side effects of chemotherapy such as nausea (feeling sick to your stomach). There are very good drugs available to help lessen the possible side effects and nausea.

The most common chemotherapy drug used for pancreatic cancer is Gemcitabine. It is usually given through an IV (through a vein) once a week. We also use an IV drug called 5FU. The length of time that you are on chemotherapy depends on the stage of cancer and how well you handle the chemotherapy. We will discuss this with you before you start on chemotherapy.

What is radiation therapy?

Radiation therapy uses high-energy radiation rays or particles to damage or destroy cancer cells. Sometimes it is given together with chemotherapy for treating pancreatic cancer. Radiation may be given to reduce pain and other symptoms of cancer.

Radiation is sometimes used after surgery if the cancer removal was not quite complete.

What are the other symptoms I might have?

Pain

You may have pain in your abdominal area which spreads in to your back. It may be worse when lying down. Your doctor can prescribe pain medication for you. We will teach you how to take it, but it is best to take it every 4 hours.

You need to let us know how the pain medication is working. You may be referred to the Pain Clinic in Supportive Care here at the JCC where you will see a doctor and nurse.

Yellow skin colour

You may notice that your skin colour and the whites of your eyes have turned yellow (jaundice). You may notice that your urine will become dark and your stools (bowel movements) may be pale in colour. If you notice these changes, call us right away.

Weight loss

You may lose weight because you have a hard time eating and digesting your food. Another reason for weight loss or change in bowel habits is that the pancreas may not be working properly and is not producing the enzymes (chemical) that break down food and help with digestion. Your doctor may prescribe pills that you can take when you eat. These pills help to digest food.

We may refer you to Supportive Care here at the JCC to meet with a dietitian to help you with eating and meal planning.

Other resources

Patient and Family Resource Centre,
Level 1 – JCC

www.jcc.hhsc.ca

Canadian Cancer Society

www.cancer.ca

Confronting Pancreatic Cancer

www.pancreatica.org

Notes



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