Worried about pancreatic cancer?
Helping you to talk to your GP

1. The pancreas is part of the digestive system and sits in the upper part of the abdominal (tummy) area. Pancreatic cancer symptoms include abdominal pain which can spread to the back, unexplained weight loss, loss of appetite, indigestion, constipation, diarrhoea, oily floating poo and jaundice (yellow skin or eyes).

2. Pancreatic cancer doesn’t cause many specific symptoms in the early stages and symptoms can be quite vague. This makes pancreatic cancer difficult to diagnose early. If you have any of these symptoms, especially if they last four weeks or more, go to your GP. If you have jaundice, go to your GP straight away.

3. Keeping a diary of your symptoms may help you to explain them to your GP. Tell them about anything unusual, even if you’re not sure it’s relevant. It might help to take a family member or friend with you to your appointment and make a note of any questions you would like to ask.

4. There is some evidence that increasing age, smoking, being overweight, a family history of pancreatic cancer, pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas) and diabetes may increase your risk of pancreatic cancer. But having some of the risk factors doesn’t mean you will definitely get pancreatic cancer, and people may get pancreatic cancer even if they don’t have any of the risk factors.

5. Pancreatic cancer is not a common cancer. Your GP may only see a new patient with pancreatic cancer every 5-8 years. If you are concerned about pancreatic cancer, tell your doctor what you are worried about and why.

6. If your GP is concerned that you may have pancreatic cancer they will refer you for tests, such as a CT scan. Being referred does not necessarily mean that you have cancer. Read more about being referred in Pancreatic Cancer UK’s fact sheet How is pancreatic cancer diagnosed? Or go to macmillan.org.uk for more information.

7. You know your own body best, so if your symptoms haven’t improved after 4 weeks tell your GP. They will want to see you. You won’t be wasting their time.

8. If your GP asks you to come back to see them, make sure you do.

9. Pancreatic cancer symptoms are similar to other health problems such as indigestion, heartburn, gallstones, irritable bowel syndrome, or pancreatitis. If you have been diagnosed with one of these, but advice and treatment hasn’t improved your symptoms, tell your GP.

10. If you’re concerned about pancreatic cancer and would like to find out more, go to pancreaticcancer.org.uk or call Pancreatic Cancer UK’s specialist nurses on 0808 801 0707. Macmillan Cancer Support can also offer information on all aspects of cancer and its treatment at macmillan.org.uk and 0808 808 0000.

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For information on the sources used in this publication please contact us at cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk

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