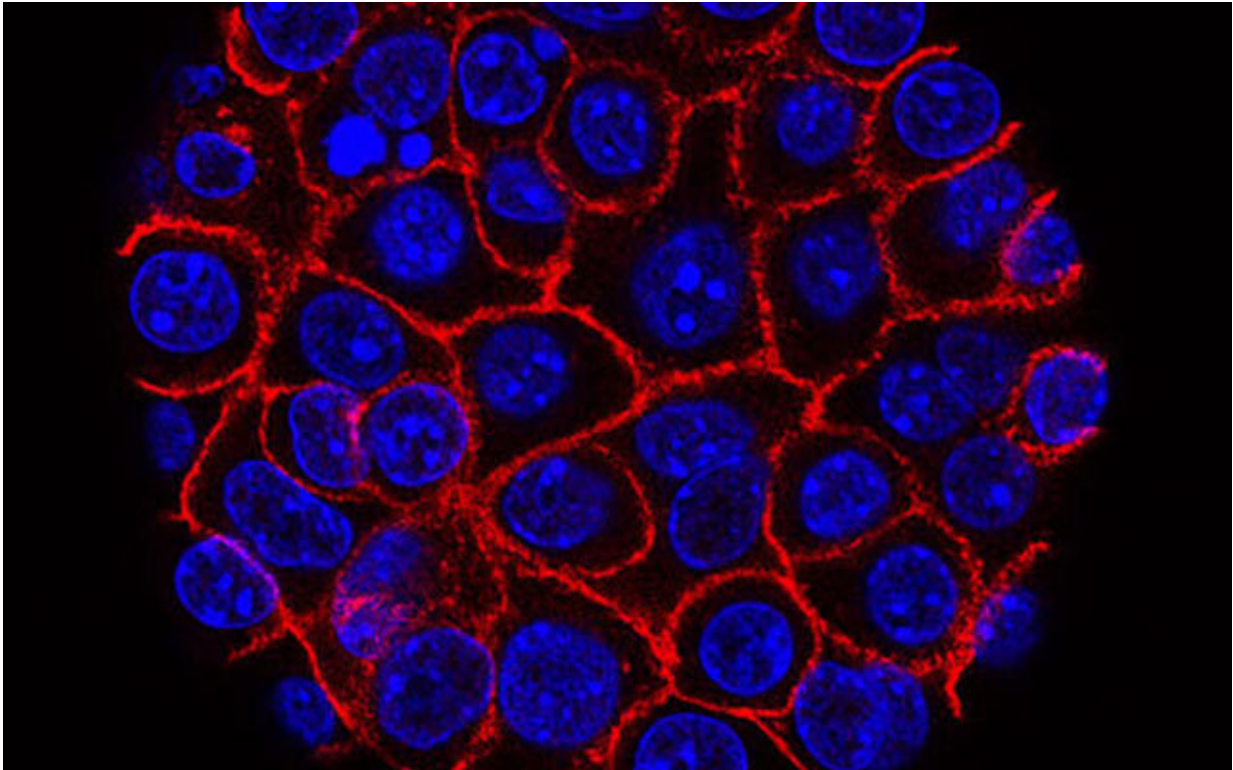


# Pancreatic cancer risks and prevention

November 4 2021, by Laurel Kelly

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Pancreatic cancer cells (blue) growing as a sphere encased in membranes (red).  
Credit: National Cancer Institute

November is Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month, which makes this a good time to learn more about the risk factors for pancreatic cancer and what you can do to keep yourself safe.

More than 60,000 people in the U.S. will be diagnosed with pancreatic

cancer this year, and more than 48,000 people will die of the disease, according to the American Cancer Society. Pancreatic cancer is the third leading cause of cancer death in the U.S.

Pancreatic cancer begins in the tissues of your pancreas—an organ in your abdomen that lies behind the lower part of your stomach. Your pancreas releases enzymes that aid digestion and produces hormones that help manage your blood sugar.

Several types of growths can occur in the pancreas, including cancerous and noncancerous tumors. The most common type of cancer that forms in the pancreas is pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma, which begins in the cells that line the ducts that carry digestive enzymes out of the pancreas.

Signs and symptoms of pancreatic cancer often don't occur until the disease is advanced. This means the disease is rarely detected at its early stages when it's most curable.

Factors that can increase your risk of pancreatic cancer include:

- Smoking.
- Diabetes.
- Chronic inflammation of the pancreas, or pancreatitis.
- Family history of genetic syndromes that can increase [cancer risk](#), including a BRCA2 gene mutation, Lynch syndrome and familial atypical mole malignant melanoma syndrome.
- Family history of [pancreatic cancer](#).
- Obesity.

- Older age, as most people are diagnosed after 65.

While some of these [risk factors](#) are out of your control, here are some lifestyle choices you can make to reduce your risk:

- Stop smoking: If you smoke, try to stop. Talk to your [health care provider](#) about strategies to help you stop, including [support groups](#), medications and nicotine replacement therapy. If you don't smoke, don't start.
- Maintain a healthy weight: If you are at a healthy weight, work to maintain it. If you need to lose weight, aim for a slow, steady weight loss—1 to 2 pounds a week. Combine daily exercise with a diet rich in vegetables, fruit and whole grains, with smaller portions to help you lose weight.
- Choose a [healthy diet](#): A diet full of colorful fruits and vegetables, and whole grains, may reduce your risk of cancer.

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