

Pancreatic Cancer and Types of Surgery

Surgical Oncology

What is pancreatic cancer?

Pancreatic cancer is classified according to which part of the pancreas is affected: the part that makes digestive substances (exocrine) or the part that makes insulin and other hormones (endocrine).

The exocrine and endocrine cells of the pancreas form different types of tumors. It is very important to know if the cancer is an exocrine or endocrine cancer. They have distinct risk factors and causes, have different signs and symptoms, are diagnosed with different tests, are treated in different ways and have different outlooks.

The term “pancreatic cancer” usually refers to pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma which is the most common type of pancreatic cancer, representing about 94% of all pancreatic tumors.

Surgery

Three types of surgery are performed to remove pancreas tumors:

- **Whipple procedure** – most common surgery used to remove tumors in the head of the pancreas
- **Distal pancreatectomy** – surgery that removes tumors in the body and tail of the pancreas
- **Total pancreatectomy** – complete removal of the pancreas

Sometimes a laparoscopy is performed before surgery to make sure that the cancer has not spread. Additionally, some patients may develop an intestinal blockage caused by the tumor. Surgery can be done to bypass the blockage or your doctor may decide to place a stent (tube) in the first part of the small intestine to open the blocked area. **Patients will get only one procedure, not bypass surgery and a stent.**