

# Bile protein may help detect pancreatic cancer

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Study suggests it could detect malignancy earlier than some blood markers

(HealthDay)—A protein "biomarker" in bile correctly identifies pancreatic cancer and may detect the cancer earlier than some markers in blood, according to a new study.

The researchers found that this marker—called vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF)—accurately distinguished pancreatic cancer from other causes of common problems in the bile duct, correctly detecting pancreatic cancer in 93 percent of cases.

Patients with cancer of the pancreatic head or the common bile duct usually have bile duct obstruction or jaundice. Bile duct obstruction, however, can also be due to noncancerous causes such as bile duct stones, the researchers said.

Bile duct obstruction is a blockage in the tubes that carry bile from the liver to the gallbladder and small intestine. Bile helps with digestion.

This study of 53 patients with bile [duct obstruction](#) found that VEGF levels in bile were significantly higher in patients with pancreatic cancer. The findings were to be presented Monday at the American College of Gastroenterology annual meeting, in San Diego. Findings presented at medical meetings should be viewed as preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

"Differentiating [pancreatic cancer](#) from other problems that also cause jaundice is important, as treatment approach is very different," study author Dr. Udayakumar Navaneethan, of the Cleveland Clinic Foundation, said in an organization news release.

"Since bile is produced in the liver and passes through the bile duct and mixes with [pancreatic secretions](#), measurement of markers in bile could identify cancer earlier than measuring some markers in blood," Navaneethan said. "We can measure VEGF in bile fluid, which is an inexpensive test, and confirm the presence of cancer rather than other expensive investigations."

**More information:** The American Cancer Society has more about [pancreatic cancer](#).

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