

Study sheds light on factors that may contribute to pancreatic cancer

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New research that provides a better understanding of pancreatic cancer may help identify individuals at increased risk. The findings are published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society.

Pancreatic cancer is a stealthy cancer that is usually detected at very late stages and has a 5-year survival rate of less than 5 percent. Strategies that might help identify which individuals have an [increased risk](#) of developing the disease are sorely needed. Some cases seem to run in families, but the genes that are responsible for such inherited predisposition remain largely unknown.

To get a better understanding of the clinical features of inherited and non-inherited forms of the disease, Andrew Biankin, MBBS, PhD, of the University of Glasgow, in Scotland, and his colleagues studied 766 patients who had been diagnosed with [pancreatic cancer](#). Patients were thought to have an inherited predisposition if they had one or more affected first-degree relatives. Otherwise, their cancer was considered sporadic.

Nearly 9 percent of patients who were diagnosed with pancreatic cancer had at least one parent or sibling who was also diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. When Dr. Biankin and his team examined the pancreas tissue adjacent to the cancer in all study participants, they found more pre-cancerous tissue in those whose first-degree relatives also had pancreatic cancer. They also found that members of these families appeared to be

at higher [risk](#) of developing other cancers including melanoma and [endometrial cancer](#). Importantly, active smoking was associated with a significantly younger age at diagnosis in all patients.

"These findings are important because they suggest that the genes we inherit from our parents likely play a significant role in our lifetime risk of developing pancreatic cancer," said Dr. Biankin. "Secondly, they emphasize that when assessing someone's individual risk of developing pancreatic cancer, it may be important to assess not just family history of pancreatic cancer but other malignancies too. Finally, our data emphasize the importance of smoking abstinence."

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