



Diabetes may raise risk of pancreatic cancer

Middle-aged, newly diagnosed patients more likely to develop disease

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WASHINGTON - Middle-aged and older Americans who are newly diagnosed with diabetes also appear to have a higher risk of deadly pancreatic cancer, according to a study published Tuesday.

For three years after their diagnosis with diabetes, patients have eight times the risk of developing pancreatic cancer, the study at the Mayo Clinic Cancer Center found.

Diabetes itself may be an early symptom of the hard-to-treat cancer, the researchers said.

"Pancreatic cancer is difficult to detect until it is in an advanced stage, leaving little hope for patients," said Dr. Suresh Chari, who led the study.

"This study is important, because it leads us closer to finding indicators that will allow earlier detection and treatment."

Pancreatic cancer kills virtually all of the 32,000 people who are diagnosed with the disease in the United States, making it the fourth leading cause of cancer death. This is in part because it shows few symptoms before it becomes advanced. Writing in the journal *Gastroenterology*, Chari and colleagues said they studied 2,122 patients from Rochester, Minnesota, aged 50 and older who were diagnosed with diabetes between 1950 and 1995.

Eight times expected rate

Pancreatic cancer is uncommon — 18 of the patients were diagnosed with the cancer within three years.

Chari's team compared this rate with the rate expected for people of similar age and sex without diabetes. The group with newly diagnosed diabetes had eight times the expected rate.

Type-2 diabetes is diagnosed when the body no longer responds properly to insulin, but, as with type-1 diabetes, can be caused by the destruction of cells in the pancreas.

"More research is needed to determine if using increased sugar levels as an indicator of pancreatic cancer is feasible," Chari said in a statement.

"Our goal now is to identify a marker in the blood that will enable us to distinguish diabetes associated with pancreatic cancer from the far more common type-2 diabetes."

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