

# Would you know signs of pancreatic cancer?

## HEALTH

with  
Dr Zak  
Uddin



**With November dedicated to raising awareness of no fewer than four different cancers, Dr Zak looks at pancreatic cancer, and asks the question, would you be able to spot the signs?**

**W**HILE we are very aware that a cough for more than three weeks, especially in anyone who smokes, could be a sign of lung cancer, a recent survey of 4,000 individuals by the charity Pancreatic Cancer UK showed that more than a third of adults with potential symptoms of pancreatic cancer would not be aware of their importance, or worse simply ignore them.

This is worrying news for a disease where survival is less than one in ten, five years after diagnosis, with early identification and treatment of the utmost importance. Pancreatic cancer is the fifth most prevalent cancer in the UK, with about 10,000 new cases every year.

The pancreas is a tadpole shaped organ which sits behind the stomach and intestines. It has two important roles; producing enzymes which help with breaking down food, and the hormones insulin and glucagon; vital to controlling the amount of sugars in the bloodstream.



**STAR:** Actor Patrick Swayze died from pancreatic cancer in 2009 at the age of just 57, 20 months after first being diagnosed with the disease

Bile is made in the liver and transported from there to the gallbladder, where it is stored. After eating, it flows down the bile duct to the in-

testines, where it also aids in digestion.

In three quarters of cases, cancer initially arises in the head of the pancreas. As this

is very close to the bile duct, even a small cancer here can block this duct, leading to symptoms. Because bile cannot enter the intestines, it

flows into the blood giving a yellow tinge to the skin and whites of the eyes, known as jaundice. Fats are not broken down and absorbed; hence they are lost in faeces, which become pale and difficult to flush away.

Other complaints such as pain in your tummy, indigestion, difficult swallowing, nausea and vomiting, and even back pain may not seem an obvious link, but nonetheless should not be ignored.

The above list may seem like a frighteningly large and diverse bunch of symptoms, but please remember that the majority of these will not be due to pancreatic cancer. However, knowing your own body and recognising any persistent change should prompt you to seek urgent medical advice.

**P**ANCREATIC cancer typically affects older individuals. It is thankfully rare under the age of forty. A small number of individuals will have a parent who also had the disease. It is linked to diabetes, but most people with diabetes will not develop pancreatic cancer.

Although certain factors cannot be altered, there is much that you can do to reduce your risk. Smoking and a diet high in fat and meat have been implicated. Obesity is associated with multiple cancers, including that of the pancreas, as well as ill health in general.

Pancreatitis, or inflammation of the pancreas, is most commonly due to gallstones or alcohol. A proportion of individuals with recurrent pancreatitis will develop pancreatic cancer.

While it would be easy to live in fear of cancer, to do so would be a waste of a life.

Small lifestyle modifications as well as seeking medical advice if something doesn't feel right will hopefully put you in the best position.

## Patients are first in the world to use new scanner

By Ella Pickover  
Press Association

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PATIENTS in Scotland have become the first in the world to use a new scanner which has been likened to "100 MRIs in one".

A team of researchers at the University of Aberdeen have scanned the first set of patients with their prototype Fast Field Cycling MRI scanner.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) uses strong magnetic fields and radiowaves to produce detailed images of inside a patient's body.

The new scanner can extract more information than a traditional MRI machine by switching the strength of the magnetic field during the scanning procedure, researchers said.

Research group leader, Professor David Lurie said: "Because Fast Field Cycling scanners can switch their magnetic field, it is almost like having 100 different MRI scanners in one."

"This gives an extra dimension to the data collected from each patient, greatly expanding the diagnostic potential."

"It is incredibly exciting to have imaged our first patients. This is a major step towards our technology being adopted by hospitals to benefit patients, which is the ultimate goal of our research."

The University of Aberdeen has a proud history with MRI machines – in the 1970s a research team from the university built the first full body-MRI scanner and used it to obtain the first clinically useful image of a patient.

These devices are now used in hospitals across the globe.

Fast Field Cycling scanners have been under development for the last ten years.

Now the first-ever patients have been scanned with the next generation scanner.

The prototype has been used to image the brains of patients who have recently suffered from a stroke, who are taking part in the so-called Puffins trial.

Researchers hope that additional information from the scanner will help doctors see the stroke-affected part of the brain more precisely, which could help with treatment and recovery plans.

Dr Mary Joan MacLeod, lead for the trial, added: "The Fast Field Cycling scanner has great potential, because it might give more accurate 'real time' information on what is happening in the brain tissue, helping to direct treatment."

## Health matters: Dr Zak answers your questions

**Q** I went to my GP to discuss my hot flushes. Although they are getting me down, I am not depressed. So I was upset when he suggested anti-depressants.  
**Anita, 48**

**A** Although it seems surprising, some anti-depressants have been found to help women suffering with menopausal symptoms. They are an approved treatment and are usually offered to those who do not

want hormone replacement therapy (HRT), or in whom it may be less suitable.

It is important that you are happy with any medication you are taking, so it might help to look at online resources before having a further consultation with your GP. You may find that anti-depressants improve your mood as well as hot flushes.

**Q** I have read a lot about the side effects of childhood immunisation, and although my three-

year-old has had them, I am not keen for my new born son to be vaccinated.  
**Josie, 29**

**A** This is a difficult one, and there will be many scare stories about the potential harms of immunisation, as highlighted by the fear that MMR vaccination was linked with autism. However this was completely disproved.

Fortunately or unfortunately, we live in a world where thanks to immunisa-

tion; many deadly diseases are very rare, or indeed have been eradicated. The downside to this is that we have forgotten the devastating effects of such a disease on the individual and society. My advice would be to have your child immunised according to the UK approved schedule.

• If you have a question for Dr Zak, you can email him via [askdoctorzak@gmail.com](mailto:askdoctorzak@gmail.com), visit his website, [doctorzak.co.uk](http://doctorzak.co.uk) or follow him on Twitter @

AskDoctorZak.

**Dr Uddin's advice is provided in good faith and in accordance with currently accepted evidence. However, this content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. You should always seek the advice of a GP, or other qualified health provider, regarding a medical condition.**