



Pancreatic cancer: tests and screening

Patient information | Source check: 2026-10-16

Start with the reason for testing

I assess symptoms, a scan finding and inherited risk separately. A normal gastroscopy or FIT does not check the pancreas. New Zealand has no national pancreatic cancer screening programme.

Symptoms need assessment

Discuss unexplained weight loss, persistent upper abdominal or back pain, pale greasy stools, or new diabetes with weight loss or pain. These changes have many causes. New yellow eyes or skin need same-day medical assessment.

Who may need surveillance?

Routine screening is not recommended for a well person at average risk. Several affected blood relatives or a relevant pathogenic gene change may justify specialist genetics and pancreatic assessment. Bring relatives' diagnoses, ages and any genetic report.

Different tests have different purposes

Tests are selected for the concern, not taken in a fixed sequence. CT can assess a suspected tumour. MRI/MRCP examines the pancreas and ducts. Specialist EUS gives close ultrasound views and can guide tissue sampling. ERCP mainly treats duct problems. CA19-9 cannot reliably screen for or rule out pancreatic cancer.

If surveillance is recommended

MRI/MRCP and EUS are commonly used, often yearly when reassuring. The specialist sets the plan. Surveillance has limitations, and new symptoms need review before the next scheduled test.

Urgent advice

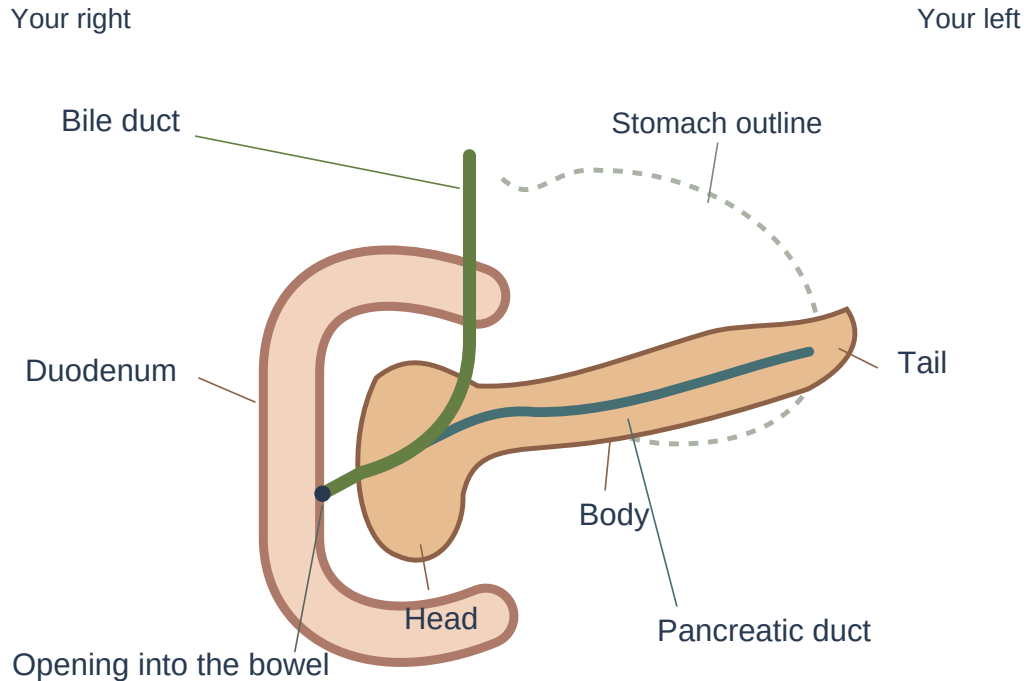
Jaundice with fever, shaking chills, severe pain, confusion or marked illness needs urgent hospital assessment. Call 111 if you collapse or are too unwell to travel safely. Do not wait for a routine appointment or email reply.





The pancreas is outside the digestive lining

Where it sits



Front view. The pancreas is mainly behind the stomach.

The pancreatic head sits beside the duodenum on your right. The body and tail extend towards your left, mainly behind the stomach. The ducts carry digestive juices into the bowel.

Read this illustration alongside the advice in this guide.

