

Diabetes Combined With Weight Loss Could Signal Pancreatic Cancer

Close attention to the combination could lead to catching the cancer before it has metastasized.

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In people with recent-onset diabetes, weight loss of any number of pounds may be an early sign of undiagnosed pancreatic cancer.

Earlier diagnosis would almost certainly be lifesaving. Pancreatic cancer, the third most common cause of cancer-related death worldwide, is considered particularly deadly because it is difficult to catch prior to metastasis.

By analyzing data on 112,818 women and 46,207 men collected by two studies over a period of 30 years, Chen Yuan and colleagues found that those who had been diagnosed with diabetes and experienced a reduction in body mass index (BMI) shortly before enrolling were more likely to develop pancreatic cancer than those with one or neither entry in their medical records.

Being overweight or obese is a well-known risk factor for type 2 diabetes. Once the disease develops, however, it can sometimes be accompanied by spontaneous weight loss, meaning weight loss that occurs without the aid of changes in diet or exercise. Weight loss can be a natural consequence of diabetes itself because the disease is capable of both elevating blood sugar and “starving” muscles of glucose so they burn fat rapidly for energy. But weight loss can also be indicative of pancreatic cancer, which causes the metabolic dysfunction that leads to diabetes—and weight loss.

The researchers also found that the participants’ chances of dying of pancreatic cancer increased with every pound lost. Participants down one to four pounds were 25% more likely to develop the disease, participants down five to eight pounds were 33% more likely to develop it and participants down more than eight pounds were 92% more likely to develop it.

Other factors found to increase pancreatic cancer risk included “older age, previous healthy weight and no intentional weight loss,” the researchers noted in [JAMA Oncology](#).

These study results suggest that people with either or both a recent diabetes diagnosis and weight loss could benefit from earlier or increased screening for pancreatic cancer, which can include CT

scans, MRI imaging and, in some cases, biopsies. Such screening is currently only recommended for people with genetic risk factors or a family history of the disease. To learn more about screening, [click here](#).

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