

Understanding the Difference: Is it Pancreatic Neuroendocrine Tumors or Pancreatic Cancer (exocrine)?

	Pancreatic Neuroendocrine Tumors (NETs)	Pancreatic Cancer (exocrine)
Definition	<p>Believed to arise from endocrine pancreas cells, which may produce several kinds of hormones and cluster together in many small groups, or islets, throughout the pancreas. Pancreatic NETs are a less common type of pancreatic cancer. It is different from pancreatic exocrine cancer, which is generally referred to as pancreatic cancer¹.</p> <p>NETs that produce symptoms caused by the secretion of hormones are classified as functional. Nonfunctional NETs do not secrete hormones. They may only produce symptoms caused by the tumor's growth.²</p> <p>Subtypes of pancreatic NETs are named according to the type of hormone-making cell they start in, and include gastrinomas (gastrin-producing cells), insulinomas (insulin-producing cells) and glucagonomas (glucagon-producing cells)¹.</p> <p>Also known as islet cell tumors¹.</p>	<p>Arise from exocrine pancreas cells, which produce enzymes that are released into the small intestine to help the body digest food^{1,2}.</p> <p>Most of the pancreas is made of ducts with small sacs at the end, which are lined with exocrine cells². About 95% of pancreatic cancers are adenocarcinomas, which begin in exocrine cells^{1,7}.</p> <p>Also known as pancreatic exocrine cancer¹.</p>
Signs & Symptoms	<p>Symptoms from functioning and/or non-functioning tumors include, but are not limited to²:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diarrhea • Abdominal pain • Persistent stomach ulcers • Skin rashes • Hypoglycemia • Gallstones 	<p>Symptoms include, but are not limited to¹:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jaundice • Abdominal or back pain • Weight loss or poor appetite • Digestive problems • Gallbladder enlargement • Blood clots or fatty tissue abnormalities
Diagnosis	<p>At time of diagnosis the majority of patients have advanced disease, meaning the cancer has spread to other parts of the body and has become more difficult to manage⁶. Lab tests and imaging tests, such as abdominal computerized axial tomography scans (CT scans) and abdominal or endoscopic ultrasounds, blood tests examining the levels of certain pancreatic hormones and biopsies are used to help detect and diagnose pancreatic NETs^{1,2}.</p>	<p>Tests that examine the pancreas are used to help detect, diagnose and stage pancreatic cancer include, but are but not limited to, imaging tests, such as CT scans, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and positron emission tomography scans (PET scans); physical exam and history; biopsy and laparoscopy⁷.</p>

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References

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