

# Pancreatic Cancer

Thom Mrozek has loved the outdoors since he was a kid. At the age of 10, he discovered what would become his lifelong outdoor passion golf.

*"It is a great release from the trials and tribulations of everyday life. No matter how bad my game might be, and it's been bad at times, it's always a beautiful day on the golf course."-Thom, Patient*

But clouds started to gather six years ago, when Thom experienced stomach pains that became too severe to ignore. After a visit to his doctor, he received surprising news.

*"I got the phone call from him telling me, "it's your pancreas." I had no idea what a pancreas was or what it did."-Thom, Patient*

The pancreas is located just behind the stomach. It's made up of a head, body and tail.

The pancreas contains two main types of cells: Exocrine, cells, which help with digestion and Endocrine cells, which regulate blood sugar.

*"Maybe 98% of the pancreas is made up of the Exocrine cells or the digestive part. Where only 5% at the very most is made up of the Endocrine cells that secrete the hormones in the blood."-Dr. Timothy Donahue, MD, UCLA School of Medicine*

Thom juggled his busy job as a public affairs officer with follow-up visits to several doctors. Eventually, he received a diagnosis: Pancreatic cancer.

*"It's like a ton of bricks. It takes the breath out of you. And it completely alters your life in ways that are just unimaginable."-Thom, Patient*

*"So, I'll have you go ahead and lie down on your back."*

To diagnose Pancreatic cancer, doctors rely on imaging tests and biopsies, which are also used to assign the cancer a stage. Stage 1 tumors are confined to the pancreas. Stage 2 cancer has spread just outside the pancreas to nearby tissues and organs. Stage 3 has spread to lymph nodes and nearby blood vessels. And Stage 4 cancer has spread to other parts of the body. Based on the stage of your cancer, as well as the location and type of cells involved, your age, and overall health. Your provider will determine which treatment is right for you.

In people like Thom, whose tumor can be removed entirely, doctors may recommend surgery. The most common type, which Thom had, is called a Whipple procedure. This operation takes up to 12 hours and involves removing the head of the pancreas, the gallbladder, and portions of the common bile duct, small

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intestine, and stomach.

*"Following a week-long stay in the hospital, I spent about six weeks here at home at my couch just literally unable to move, because it is such a significant and debilitating procedure."-Thom, Patient*

Other treatment options include Chemotherapy, which uses medications, taken by IV or mouth, to kill cancer cells all over the body and radiation, which kills cancer cells with high-energy X-rays. Chemotherapy and radiation may also be used after surgery to try to kill any lingering cancer cells and keep the cancer from coming back. In most cases, though, Pancreatic cancer cannot be removed surgically, and chemotherapy is the main treatment to shrink the cancer or slow its growth.

*"In the last eight years or so effective chemotherapies have been identified for patients with pancreatic cancer, which have impacted the survival rate."- Dr. Timothy Donahue, MD, UCLA School of Medicine*

Doctors may also prescribe so-called Targeted Therapy. Medications that block certain substances that help cancer cells grow. Also, those who are eligible may consider enrolling in clinical trials which are studies of new therapies. Regardless of your treatment, you may experience pain from your cancer. If so, let your health care team know because they have treatments that can provide relief. Today Thom is free of pain, but he still has other effects.

*"I'm reminded every single day what happened to me. I have digestive issues. I don't have the energy that I used to have, but when it's all said and done, I couldn't be happier."-Thom, Patient*

Since his diagnosis, Thom's goal has been to see his daughter graduate from high school.

*"I'm over halfway there now, and I have high hopes of seeing her go off to a wonderful university."- Thom, Patient*