

# February is National Cancer Prevention Month: Genetics

If you have a history of pancreatic cancer in your family, a basic understanding of [genetic risk factors](#) and resources may help you prevent a diagnosis or detect it early. We may not “have a say” when it comes to DNA but we are empowered to learn about pancreatic cancer, talk to family members about our health history and take steps to lessen risk. This knowledge, in combination with the resources the Hirshberg Foundation provides, can help address your concerns about Familial Pancreatic Cancer (FPC).

When two first-degree relatives (parent, child or sibling) have been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, seeking [genetic counseling](#) is part of your path to education and prevention. Having a family history does not necessarily mean you will develop pancreatic cancer, but it can increase your risk. Familial or hereditary pancreatic cancer accounts for about 10% of pancreatic cancer diagnosis.

Gene mutations can be passed down through generations, known as inherited mutations and can increase your risk for developing pancreatic and other cancers. For example, the [BRCA1 & BRCA2](#) gene mutations, in part, account for an increased risk of cancer among [Ashkenazi Jews](#). Several [genetic mutations](#) are currently being researched for their connection to an increased risk of developing pancreatic and other cancers. These genes include: PRSS1, BRCA1, BRCA2, ATM, PALB2, MLH1, MSH2, EPCAM, MSH6, APC, STK11, and CDKN2A. Each of these genes have a different risk profile and different cancer risks depending on the individual gene. [Genetic testing](#) and counseling can lead to medical management to reduce the chance of developing cancer or

increased surveillance for cancer, with the goal of detecting cancer earlier when treatment options and outcomes are better.

Learning your family history and knowing the risk factors can help you take proactive steps. You can find a genetic counselor in the US or Canada by contacting the [National Society of Genetic Counselors](#). The [National Comprehensive Cancer Network](#) (NCCN) recommends genetic counselling for all individuals diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, however, genetic testing is not limited to patients. As you investigate your family history, it is also important to understand the basics about this disease. Take the time to discover [what your pancreas is](#) and which [modifiable risk factors](#) you can prevent. Understanding your genetic make-up will help you determine whether your DNA puts you at higher risk and how to tackle those challenges.

Learn more about [genetic risk factors](#).

## Genetic Counseling

[Wendy Conlon](#), MS, CGC, a genetic counselor with the UCLA Center for Pancreatic Diseases is a highly esteemed and trusted speaker for Hirshberg Foundation educational events. She oversees surveillance of patients and their family members, provides risk assessment, genetic counseling, and genetic testing for individuals with pancreatic cancer and their at-risk relatives. She helps individuals and families navigate their treatment options, as well as other cancer prevention strategies. In 2020 she was featured in our ongoing Patient & Family Webinar Series providing important updates on [genetic counseling and access to testing during COVID 19](#). In 2019, she also provided her expertise when she presented on [Why Should I See a Genetic Counselor](#) at the Hirshberg Foundation's annual Symposium on Pancreatic Cancer. We invite you to take advantage of these

videos and other resources shared so you can learn about the benefits of genetic counseling.

Watch [Why Should I See a Genetic Counselor](#)

Watch [Genetic Counseling: Review and Updates During COVID-19](#)

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# February is National Cancer Prevention Month: Lifestyle

*Throughout National Cancer Prevention Month we'll share risk factors, scientific research, webinars on topics touching on prevention and facts about how you can make an impact.*

The choices we make *and* avoid when it comes to our personal health can have a ripple effect throughout the body. Research has shown that certain lifestyle choices, such as smoking, can damage cells and create a domino effect throughout our DNA. When cells become damaged, there is a risk of gene mutations that can cause cells to divide at unprecedented rates and grow exponentially. When cells grow rapidly, out of control or do not die off at the appropriate time, they cause tumors. In most pancreatic cancer cases, [risk factors](#) such as smoking, obesity, stage-2 diabetes and chronic pancreatitis can cause these DNA mutations. The first steps on the path to prevention are to adopt a healthy lifestyle and lower your modifiable risk factors.

Our [Path to Prevention](#) worksheet outlines risk factors to avoid and steps you can take to get on track towards wellness. While the scientific community is investigating possible methods for

prevention and early screening, it is up to us to stay vigilant about our health. If you smoke make a [plan to quit](#), reduce your alcohol intake and remember that your food choices matter. Build a lifestyle around [nutritious food](#), find ways to [boost the immune system](#), take care to [reduce stress](#) and [kick bad habits](#) as these changes may even save your life. Speak with your doctor on the best course of action to reduce inflammation, prevent insulin-resistance and lower stress. The path to prevention starts with a healthy lifestyle that can help lower your risk for cancer.

[Share our Path to Prevention worksheet with your community »](#)

## Prevention Research

In 2020, a team of UCLA researchers were awarded an [NIH grant for \\$5.75 million](#) to study the roles diet, obesity and inflammation play in the development of pancreatic cancer. "We know that the biological mechanisms of obesity, such as inflammation, can lead to the development of pancreatic cancer," said Dr. Guido Eibl, Laboratory Director of the [Hirshberg Translational Pancreatic Cancer Research Laboratory](#). This study will look at the mechanisms that drive the formation of pancreas tumors with the goal of prevention strategies for those at higher risk. Dr. Eibl included, "Several known and modifiable risk factors can increase the risk for pancreatic cancer, including obesity, smoking, and alcohol. In addition, chronic pancreatitis and genetic factors can enhance the risk for pancreatic cancer. It is paramount to avoid or lower known risk factors, manage chronic pancreatitis, and get genetic counseling (if pancreatic cancer runs in the family) to reduce the risk of and prevent pancreatic cancer."

[Read more about Dr. Eibl's research »](#)

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# February is National Cancer Prevention Month!

*Throughout National Cancer Prevention Month we'll share risk factors, scientific research, webinars on topics touching on prevention and facts about how you can make an impact.*

The first step on the pancreatic cancer prevention path is making healthy lifestyle choices. It takes decisive action to commit to quit smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, avoiding diabetes and managing pancreatitis. Learning about these lifestyle changes, or [modifiable risk factors](#), empowers us to make healthy choices that can help prevent cancer. Adopting healthy lifestyle choices is the first step towards decreasing risk.

While we can change some risk factors, others are beyond our control, like family history and genetics. Knowledge is power when it comes to these immutable risk factors. It is important to know your family history and determine if there are familial risk factors. Seeking out a qualified geneticist allows those at an increased risk for hereditary pancreatic cancer to make proactive choices. While there is still no early screening test for pancreatic cancer, those with a genetic predisposition may qualify for [screening programs](#). Across the US researchers have created pancreatic cancer tumor registries to track people with an increased genetic risk. Some of these registries include:

- The [Pancreatic Tumor Registry](#) at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC)
- The [National Familial Pancreatic Tumor Registry](#) (NFPTR) at

Johns Hopkins University

- The [Cancer of the Pancreas Screening-5](#) (CAPS5) Study which is also a clinical trial currently conducted at 8 universities

Researchers continue to investigate what puts us at risk organically, genetically, environmentally and socioeconomically so that we can better prevent and treat pancreatic cancer. While scientists continue to explore and uncover what leads to pancreatic cancer, the first step on the path to prevention is to stay vigilant with your healthy choices.

[Learn more about risk factors »](#)

## Prevention Research

The Hirshberg Foundation funds research to better understand the biology behind tumor development as well as to fully understand how environmental factors can accelerate tumor growth. This research contributes to pancreatic cancer prevention, early screening and treatment options.

The Sahin-Toth Laboratory, under the direction of leading pancreatic disease researcher, Dr. Sahin-Toth, is contributing to our understanding of this disease and one of the largest risk factors: chronic pancreatitis. In 2020, the Sahin-Toth lab [published 10 papers](#), including a new study that looks at lifestyle factors and acute pancreatitis to determine prevention strategies. Working closely with the [Hirshberg Translational Pancreatic Cancer Research Laboratory](#) these two labs are working to better understand how diet, obesity, genetics & inflammation contribute to pancreatic cancer acceleration.

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# Breaking Up With Cancer

*By Wendy Hammers*

As part of our Patient & Family Webinars series, Wendy Hammers [shared](#) her 10 tenets that supported her throughout her treatment and continue to guide her as a 5-year pancreatic cancer survivor.

## 1. Adopting a Wellness Stance

Assume health. Decide you are getting better. You do not have to assume the worst. Assume the best. In the words of [Dr. Christy Funk](#), “You are a survivor from the moment you get diagnosed, because you didn’t die.” Surround yourself with people, places and things that believe in your positive outcome. Create your wellness bubble and block CNN, the “constant negative news.” There is nothing to be gained by thinking the worst. It is amazing how optimism can literally affect your outcome.

## 2. Fierce Listening

Listen! With your whole heart, to the still, small voice inside, to the gut feelings. Listen to your team. Listen to your compassionate tribe. And listen to yourself, above all. If your doctor does not feel right, or makes you feel more sick, or doesn’t support your wellness stance, there are others – make your healthcare team work for you. Listen to your body, if you think a purple crystal will help, try it!

### **3. Radical Self Compassion**

Decide to love yourself. Love every single part of yourself. Extreme kindness helped save my life, it can work for you too. Be compassionate to yourself as you go through treatment and the different ways it will change your body & what you are able to do.

### **4. Learning to Receive**

Let others help you heal. Now is not the time to go it alone, you do not need to be a hero. You need support, and people want to support you. Learn to receive help and you set up a boomerang health cycle. Accept help. Once you are well, you'll be able to pay it forward.

### **5. Stillness as a Spiritual Practice**

“Don't just do something, sit there.” – [Sylvia Boorstein](#).  
Cancer will slow you down, take that as a good thing.

### **6. Serious Sense of Humor**

Loopy Loopenstein is my alter ego, the me on drugs from the hospital. I decided to find the joy and humor in things. People will do weird and unhelpful things, laugh it off, it is the only way.

### **7. Cultivating a Kick ass Community**

Build your Recovery Tribe. Healing is a family affair. There are people who want to support you and help you, find them and surround yourself with them.



## **8. Taking a Day off from Cancer**

Because everyone needs a day off, even cancer patients. Find something, a day, a concert, something where you can decide to exist as someone without cancer. This might also be deciding that you want to help others. Small acts of kindness for others go a long way in lifting spirits and feeling like you are contributing.

## **9. Woo Woo Woo**

My deep dive into alternate healing modalities to supplement my traditional treatment. Supplements, feng shui, sound baths, writing workshops, crystals. I started thinking of it as a project I was doing, a project to get well. I tried all sorts of things that made sense to me, and then when people suggested ridiculous things, I listened deeply and decided if it felt right for me.

## **10. Life Beyond the Project**

“Tell me – what is it that you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” – [Mary Oliver](#)

I spent a lot of time thinking about what my life would look like on the other side of cancer. I spent so much time thinking about my really cool life, I didn't have time to be scared.

## **Additional Resources:**



Wellness Coach – [Marisa Harris](#)



Bodyworker/healer – [James Arena](#)



Tibetan Sound Bowls – [Jahna and Michael](#)



## [Cancer Support Community Los Angeles](#)

Want to speak directly to Wendy? Reach out here:  
[wendyhammers.com](http://wendyhammers.com)

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# **Living with Pancreatic Cancer: Patient And Caregiver Experiences Study (PACES) Seeks Volunteers**

The “Living with Pancreatic Cancer: Patient And Caregiver Experiences Study (PACES),” conducted by Dr. Annette Stanton is seeking volunteers. Dr. Stanton is a 2016 [Seed Grant Awardee](#) and spoke at the [2018 Symposium](#) on the importance of managing the emotional journey, for both pancreatic cancer patients and their caregivers. PACES continues Dr. Stanton’s esteemed career of working to improve the psychological and physical health of patients & caregivers over the course of the cancer trajectory.

# **Living with Pancreatic Cancer: Patient And Caregiver Experiences Study (PACES)**

## **Introduction:**

When diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, adults and their loved ones often do not know what to expect. It is important for both affected individuals and their medical teams to understand the likely physical, psychological, and social consequences of the experiences, as well as useful strategies for living with and beyond the disease and its treatment. By taking part in the current study, you can advance the understanding of the experience of pancreatic cancer, and pave the way for the development of approaches to promote quality of life and health for adults living with pancreatic cancer.

## **Why is the study being conducted?**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the physical and psychological well-being of individuals with pancreatic cancer and their caregivers (e.g., spouse).

## **Who can participate?**

Individuals with a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer and their primary caregivers are invited to take part in this study.

## **What is involved?**

Participants will complete one 90 minute in-person session at UCLA as well as three questionnaires over the course of four months. Questionnaires about topics such as physical and psychological experiences, coping with pancreatic cancer, and your relationship with your caregiver or individual with pancreatic cancer. Participation is completely voluntary and participants will be compensated \$40 each for their time.

**How can I contact the study team to learn about the study and take part?**

Email our study at [paces.ucla@gmail.com](mailto:paces.ucla@gmail.com). The Principal Investigator for the study is Dr. Annette Stanton at UCLA.

This study is closed for recruitment.



**HIRSHBERG FOUNDATION  
FOR PANCREATIC CANCER RESEARCH**

**A Research Study of  
University of California, Los Angeles**

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## **August is National Wellness Month**

It's National Wellness Month – a perfect time to re-introduce self-care into our daily lives. As we all face extraordinary challenges in 2020, the Hirshberg Foundation is offering resources, webinars, fitness activities and tools to support your mind and body health. In August, we'll share several topics that will inspire and motivate – here's to a healthy August!

# Resources for the Mind:

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## **CANNABIS AND ONCOLOGY: WHAT DO WE KNOW?**

*Patient & Family Webinar Series*

[Join us on August 28th with Dr. Noah Federman](#) to learn more about cannabis and oncology. In Dr. Federman's clinical oncology practice, he uses cannabis and cannabinoid compounds as adjunctive therapies and has a keen interest in how they can help patients. He will share the science behind the many anecdotal stories in this ever-emerging field.

## **BREAKING UP WITH PANCREATIC CANCER: SURVIVOR STORIES**

*Patient & Family Webinar Series*

Two incredible long-term survivors share their stories and tips for taking a wellness approach with pancreatic cancer. Wendy Hammers, an actress, speaker, and 5-year survivor leads a discussion alongside Marisa Harris, a life coach and 21-year, stage-4 pancreatic cancer survivor. [Learn about setting your own healthy path](#) and how to get yourself in the right mental space to tackle any life change during diagnosis and beyond.

# COPING SKILLS FOR THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY

*Tools and Tips During COVID-19*

During this time of uncertainty, stress levels can skyrocket, especially for cancer patients. Emotional well-being is a critical piece of the healing process, so now, more than ever, it is essential to have [coping skills](#). We turned to Elizabeth Cleary, PhD, Licensed Clinical Psychologist at the Simms/Mann UCLA Center for Integrative Oncology, to lead an [interactive webinar](#).

## MANAGING THE EMOTIONAL JOURNEY

*Symposium on Pancreatic Cancer*

Dr. Annette Stanton, PhD, has significantly contributed to the Hirshberg Foundation's Symposium for Pancreatic Cancer as a guest speaker. In her ["Managing the Emotional Journey"](#) Symposium video, she discusses how important it is to understand the emotional journey that cancer patients and loved ones experience once diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. As a Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry/ Biobehavioral Sciences, Stanton has researched factors that promote or impede psychological and physical health in adults and couples undergoing chronically stressful experiences. She then translates her findings into action by developing and testing approaches to enhance psychological and physical health over the course of the cancer trajectory.

# Resources for the Body:

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## COOKING HEALTHY WITH DR. LI

*Cooking Class Video & Recipes*

[Symposium speaker Dr. Zhaoping Li](#), the Director of the UCLA Center for Human Nutrition, and Chef Claire Hansen of Sur la Table gathered with survivors, caregivers and instructors cook up [healthy recipes](#) including Lemon-Barley Pilaf with Chicken and Thyme, Oven-Roasted Cod and Strawberry Smoothies. Before you start cooking these delicious recipes, check out our newest Purple E-Store item, a [Never Give Up](#) apron benefiting pancreatic cancer research!

## TOUR DE PIER

*Join Us for a Virtual Tour de Pier on September 13, 2020*

Tour de Pier is back, in a whole new way! On September 13, 2020, we're going virtual. Your [registration](#) will help ensure that our three charities can continue to provide crucial resources to those facing cancer. Plus, since we're virtual, we have options to ensure that everyone can get involved.

## 23rd ANNUAL VIRTUAL LA CANCER CHALLENGE

*Walk/Run Any Time, Place, or Pace you Choose*



The 23rd Annual [Virtual LA Cancer Challenge Walk/Run](#) on Sunday, October 25th will now take place nationwide at any time, place or pace you choose! We've got plenty of resources & ideas to customize your participation, a Purple Spirit Kit to get festively purple, a [Virtual FB Group](#) to share ideas and Ambassadors to inspire and lead the way. Your commitment and passion to find a cure burns bright and our LACC walk/run is when we shine the brightest. Learn More about our virtual event resources and register today!

## **LEARN THE RISKS & SYMPTOMS OF PANCREATIC CANCER**

People with certain risk factors may be more likely than others to develop cancer of the pancreas. Pancreatic cancer symptoms are often barely noticeable or could be associated with other medical conditions. It is crucial that we all have a better understanding of [how the pancreas functions](#), what puts [those at higher risk](#), what all of the [known risk factors](#) include and the [symptoms](#) that could indicate cancer. We share these resources and tools in an effort to prevent and detect pancreatic cancer early.

## **HIRSHBERG TRAINING TEAM**

*Train for the LA Marathon, honor a loved one and cross the finish line*

The iconic LA Marathon is a rewarding and memorable race experience as you run from Dodger Stadium to Century City's Avenue of the Stars! Training is a commitment to your mental and physical health, a great reason to get active, and a priceless opportunity to honor a loved one and raise funds research and patient programs. Plus, we've got great

fundraising prizes and HTT gear to help motivate you. With training options that fit event the busiest of schedules, there's nothing stopping you from making the commitment to cross the finish line on Sunday, March 21, 2021. [Register today!](#)

At the Hirshberg Foundation we are committed to supporting the health and wellness of our patients. This National Wellness Month, help **support these services benefitting the pancreatic cancer community by making a [much-needed donation](#) today!**