Metastatic Pancreatic Cancer (mPaC)

What is the pancreas?

The pancreas is an organ located behind the stomach, which produces enzymes (proteins that help with digestion) and hormones (our body's chemical 'messengers'). Importantly, the pancreas creates insulin and glucagon, two hormones that regulate glucose levels, your body's main source of energy.

What is pancreatic cancer?

Pancreatic cancer is a type of gastrointestinal (GI) cancer that forms in specific cells in the pancreas.

What is mPaC?

mPaC, also known as advanced, stage IV or secondary pancreatic cancer, is a cancer that began in the pancreas and has now spread to other parts of the body. mPaC typically spreads to the liver, tissue lining of the bowels or abdomen (where your organs are contained), lungs or bones.

What are the possible symptoms of mPaC?

Symptoms of mPaC will vary for each person, and you may get different symptoms at different periods or depending on where in your body it has spread to. Common mPaC symptoms can include:

- Feeling tired and generally unwell
- Diabetes (known as type 3c diabetes)
- Feeling and being sick
- Weight loss
- A build up of fluid in your tummy area
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Tummy pain or bloating
- Yellowing of eyes and skin (called jaundice)
- A build up of fluid in your tummy area
- Feeling tired and generally unwell
- Diabetes (known as type 3c diabetes)

Speak to your health care team if you notice these symptoms persisting or they are concerning you.

For more details on your metastatic GI cancer journey, including information on the emotional side of cancer, your health care team, living with a metastatic GI cancer, the role of patient organizations and peer support, and planning your future, please see the MyJourney patient brochure.

For further information on symptoms, treatment, and side effects, consult the ESMO Cancer Guide for mPaC patients

https://www.esmo.org/content/download/6625/115171/1/EN-Pancreatic-Cancer-Guide-for-Patients.pdf

2. Johns Hopkins. Pancreas Function. Available at: https://pathology.jhu.edu/pancreas/basics/function

Instagram credit: iStock/Getty Images Plus & Getty Images DigitalVision Vectors
What are the possible side effects of chemotherapy for mPaC?
The side effects of chemotherapy will depend on the type of medication and the dose used. Common side effects can include:

- fatigue
- loose bowel movements
- loss of appetite, taste changes or a sore mouth.
- feeling and being sick
- tingling or numbness in fingers and toes
- losing your hair
- blood clots
- loss of appetite, taste changes or a sore mouth.

Every patient is different and treatment options will need to be discussed with a range of health care professionals (HCPs) as part of a multidisciplinary team, sometimes known as a tumor board. At this stage, treatment will not cure your cancer; instead, it will aim to control the growth of your cancer, manage any of your symptoms, and maintain quality of life.

mPaC cannot be surgically removed – you may hear HCPs call your cancer inoperable or unresectable. If you have mPaC and are well enough, you may be able to have chemotherapy – a type of treatment that shrinks or slows down the growth of your tumor.

If you are too unwell to have chemotherapy, or choose not to, you will receive palliative care, which aims to manage your symptoms and improve how you feel (see page 46 in the MyJourney patient brochure for details on palliative care).

Other treatments may also be available to you through clinical trials (see page 20 in the MyJourney patient brochure for details on clinical trials).

You may also wish to seek a second medical opinion, depending upon your circumstances and considering the positives and benefits (see page 19 in the MyJourney patient brochure for more details).

What is my outlook with an mPaC diagnosis?
Outlook, or prognosis, will vary for each person with mPaC and depends on many things. On average, around 30% of people with mPaC will survive their cancer for 1 year or more after diagnosis. However, this is an average, and your doctor will be able to give you an approximate idea of what to expect.

You may also not wish to know your outlook; instead, you may want only your loved ones to know your outlook or only how your symptoms may change over time.