Although pancreatic cancer is the fourth most common cause of death in the United States, this killer didn’t get much attention until popular actor Patrick Swayze of Dirty Dancing fame died of the disease in 2009. Because the cancer has an extremely low survival rate, early screening, detection and treatment are crucial.

Who Has High Risk?
Some risk factors are out of your control, such as age (older than 45), gender (males are 30 percent more at risk), race (African-Americans are at higher risk than whites and Hispanics) and family history. You can change other factors, such as tobacco use, weight and chemical exposure. The risk for pancreatic cancer is about twice as high among smokers.

“The disease is also more common in people who have diabetes, are overweight or obese, or suffer with chronic pancreatitis,” explains board-certified gastroenterologist Marc F. Catalano, M.D., who is affiliated with Memorial Hermann Southeast Hospital. “Heavy exposure to certain pesticides, dyes and chemicals used in the metal industry may also increase your risk.”

Know the Symptoms
The pancreas is a 6-inch-long gland shaped like a thin pear, located between your stomach and the spine. Pancreatic cancer often does not have any signs, particularly in the early stages. By the time it does cause symptoms, the cancer has often already grown or spread.

The most common symptoms include upper-abdomen or upper-back pain, loss of appetite and weight loss. Patients may also experience indigestion, nausea or vomiting. Yellowing of the eyes and skin is typical. Because these symptoms can be gradual and possibly caused by something else, it’s important to see a doctor.

Besides a physical exam and medical history, your doctor might use noninvasive imaging such as an abdominal ultrasound, CT scan or MRI. To detect smaller tumors or enhance diagnostic capabilities, more invasive procedures might be needed.

Find the Right Treatment
Specific treatment is based on your age, overall health and medical history. Nonsurgical options may be used as a primary treatment or in preparation for surgery. Using high levels of radiation, doctors are able to precisely target cancer cells. This therapy may be given alone or in combination with chemotherapy. Depending on the type and stage of the cancer, surgery may also be necessary.

The success of treatment requires a multidisciplinary approach by dedicated nurses, dietitians, geneticists, technicians and physicians, tailored to the individual patient, using the most advanced technology available.
Dr. Hamid is a neurologist and pain management physician. Dr. Hsieh is a neurosurgeon.

The spine is a biomechanical marvel. It’s designed to be stable enough to hold up our body, yet flexible enough to let us twist and bend. This complexity, however, makes it vulnerable to injury and natural wear and tear, both of which can cause back pain.

“When I see a patient with back pain, my first step is to perform a thorough history and evaluation to determine the source of the pain,” says Basem Hamid, M.D., a neurologist and pain management physician affiliated with Memorial Hermann Southeast Hospital.

Pain Management Procedures
Dr. Hamid may start by prescribing conservative measures, such as oral medications and physical therapy. If these strategies don’t provide adequate relief, he moves on to more targeted treatments that may be options for patients who can’t have or don’t need surgery, or who want to try a less invasive option before surgery.

Some procedures he performs include:

Spinal cord stimulation. This treatment uses a mild electrical current to block painful nerve impulses. Patients start the treatment with an external generator. If they experience significant relief, an internal generator can be implanted in the abdomen or buttocks.

Kyphoplasty. People with osteoporosis may be prone to fractures in their vertebral (spinal) bones. Kyphoplasty involves inserting a tiny balloon into the broken vertebra and inflating it, pushing the bone fragments back into their normal position and creating a cavity. Dr. Hamid then removes the balloon and fills the cavity with quick-hardening medical cement, forming an internal scaffold that allows the bone to heal in a natural position.

Surgical Solutions
Surgery is a possible option to relieve pain that is caused by injury or joint disease. Joseph Hsieh, M.D., a neurosurgeon affiliated with Memorial Hermann Southeast, offers many surgical techniques to repair the spine, such as:

Decompression procedures. In these procedures, Dr. Hsieh removes disk fragments that cause painful pressure on the nerves and spinal cord.

“Spinal surgeries have improved dramatically in the last 10 years because of better instruments and technology, including navigational equipment that allows us to place supportive devices more accurately,” Dr. Hsieh says. “Our goal is to home in on the issue causing the pain and offer a targeted procedure that gets to the root of the issue.”
Good Habits Today Can Prevent Heart Failure Tomorrow

Heart failure is a condition in which the heart can’t pump enough blood to meet the body’s needs. In fact, it’s the leading reason for hospital stays in people older than age 65.

“Heart failure is one of the leading causes of death in the U.S. Once diagnosed, it is a chronic health condition that poses a significant burden on the patient and family,” explains Angelo Nascimbene, M.D., a board-certified cardiologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann Southeast Hospital. “Our current challenge is to prevent that diagnosis of heart failure by reducing well-known risk factors. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to help prevent heart failure.”

**Are You At Risk?**
People who have had a heart attack are especially at risk, as well as people who have high blood pressure or diabetes. And if you have one or more of the following risk factors, talk with your doctor today about how you can protect your heart health:

- I am age 65 or older.
- I have high cholesterol.
- I have sleep apnea.
- I am African-American.
- I am overweight or do not get regular physical activity.
- I smoke or am a heavy drinker.
- I have a family history of heart disease.

**4 Ways to Protect Your Heart**

“A healthy lifestyle goes a long way in preventing heart failure,” says Avinash Bapat, M.D., a board-certified cardiologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann Southeast. “And if you already have the disease, you can slow its progression.”

Don’t put off making changes. The sooner you start taking healthy lifestyle steps, the better your chances of preventing this serious disease.

- **Strive for a balanced diet.** Build your meals around vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans. Include lean meats, poultry and fish, and fat-free or low-fat milk products.
- **Be regular about exercise.** Aim for at least 30 minutes a day. But even 60 minutes of moderate-intensity activity each week has heart benefits.
- **Take control of health conditions.** Control risk factors such as blood cholesterol, blood pressure and diabetes. Avoid saturated fat and high-sodium foods, and monitor your blood glucose if you have diabetes.
- **Keep your doctor in the loop.** Taking the medicines your physician prescribes and having regularly scheduled visits with him or her are important.

**QUALITY CARE FOR YOUR HEART.**
Memorial Hermann Southeast offers an accredited Chest Pain Center, ensuring patients receive the gold standard in emergent cardiac care. Find out about our full range of services at www.memorialhermann.org/southeast.
While rare diseases like Ebola make the news, did you know tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the U.S.? Smoking and smokeless tobacco harm nearly every organ of your body, causing many diseases and affecting your overall health. If you use tobacco, you should be especially concerned about two types of cancer: oral cancer and lung cancer.

Facts About Oral Cancer

Oral cancer includes cancers of the lip, tongue, mouth and gums. Fortunately, oral cancer can be successfully treated when it’s discovered early.

“The biggest risk factor for oral cancer is tobacco use,” says Michael Byrd, M.D., a board-certified otolaryngologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann Southeast Hospital. “Most people who get oral cancer use tobacco.”

People who use snuff have a much higher risk for cancer in the lips, cheeks and gums. The younger you were when you started using tobacco and the longer you’ve used it, the greater your risk.

Although tobacco use is a leading cause of oral cancer, drinking a lot of alcohol – two or more drinks per day – also increases your risk. Exposure to the sun can also cause...
Facts About Lung Cancer
Lung cancer is the top cause of U.S. cancer deaths in both men and women, claiming more lives than breast, colon and prostate cancers combined.

“You may not notice signs of lung cancer in its early stage,” says Farzaneh Banki, M.D., a board-certified thoracic surgeon affiliated with Memorial Hermann Southeast. “In fact, many lung cancers do not cause any symptoms until they have already spread.”

When lung cancer does cause symptoms, they’re often health problems you’d have anyway if you smoke. For example, some early signs of lung cancer include shortness of breath and the inability to exercise without feeling out of breath or coughing.

Call your doctor if you notice any of the following signs:
• A cough that doesn’t go away and gets worse over time
• Chest pain that is constant
• Hoarseness or wheezing
• Coughing up blood or rust-colored mucus
• Pneumonia or bronchitis that occurs more often than usual
• Headaches, seizures or confusion
• Enlarged lymph nodes in the neck

“People also have an increased risk for lung cancer if their parents or siblings have had the disease,” explains Philip Rascoe, M.D., a board-certified thoracic surgeon affiliated with Memorial Hermann Southeast. “The increased risk could come from sharing behaviors such as smoking, or from inheriting a gene that makes them prone to the disease.”

Looking at Your Lungs
If you’re having lung-cancer-like symptoms, your doctor will want to know why. In addition to asking you questions about your medical and family history, smoking history and exposure to other risk factors, your doctor may also do these things:
• Perform a physical exam, which will include listening to your breathing
• Give you a sputum cytology test. For this test, you collect the substance you spit up from your lungs, called sputum, each morning for three to five days. A pathologist then looks at the sputum under a microscope for cancer cells. Not all types of lung cancer show up in this test.
• Schedule an X-ray of your chest to look for masses in your lungs
• Arrange for other imaging tests, like a CT (computed tomography) scan, to get a better picture of your lungs.

The results of these exams may be enough to rule out lung cancer. Or you may require further tests.

To reduce your cancer risk, control your risk factors. If you’re a smoker or former smoker older than 55, ask your doctor if you should have a CT scan to screen for lung cancer.

“The Cancer Center at Memorial Hermann Southeast offers a lung cancer screening program that allows detection of lung cancer in its early stage using CT scans,” says Dr. Banki. “We believe in a multidisciplinary approach for treatment of lung cancer. Our specialized team includes board-certified thoracic surgeons, anesthesiologists, pulmonologists, radiation oncologists, medical oncologists, specialized nurses, respiratory therapists and physical therapists, who all provide exceptional care for treatment of patients.”
Millions of Americans undergo surgery each year. It is important to have all the facts about the surgery your doctor is recommending, particularly if it is elective surgery (an operation you choose to have done), rather than an emergency surgery.

“All surgeries have risks and benefits,” says Joshua Hamilton, M.D., a board-certified surgeon affiliated with Memorial Hermann Southeast Hospital. “Your physician can provide you with all your treatment options and how patients similar to you have recovered.”

Don’t hesitate to ask your doctor questions. If you don’t understand the explanation or a medical term, say so and ask for clarification. Here are some useful things to ask:

• How long will recovery take?
• Do I need someone to drive me home after surgery?
• If I experience any pain after surgery, how will it be handled?
• What postoperative instructions do I need to follow? Do I need to change dressings, take post-op medications or schedule follow-up appointments?

You might also need to avoid certain foods, drinks, supplements or medications before or after surgery.

“In some cases, common over-the-counter drugs and herbal supplements can be dangerous if taken before surgery,” explains Dr. Hamilton. “Others may interact harmfully with medicine prescribed by your doctor.”

Here are some preparations to consider before your surgery:

• Arrange all insurance coverage prior to surgery. Many insurance carriers do not cover many types of plastic surgery procedures (particularly cosmetic procedures).
• Help your body get ready. If you quit smoking at least four weeks before your operation and stay smoke-free four weeks after, you can decrease your risk for complications by 50 percent.
• Don’t drink or eat for the recommended time period before and/or after surgery.
• Leave valuables and jewelry at home. Don’t wear contact lenses or makeup the day of surgery, including nail polish.
• Let your doctor know if any changes in your health occur before surgery – even if it’s just a cold.

Ask your doctor what to expect in the first few days after surgery, as well as in the weeks and months that follow. “Knowing ahead of time what to expect will help you cope and recover more quickly following your surgery,” says Dr. Hamilton.

Dr. Hamilton is a surgeon.

KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT. Before having surgery, make sure to get the answers to all your questions about the procedure. For more frequently asked questions, visit www.memorialhermann.org/patients-caregivers.
Top Tips for Preventing Colorectal Cancer

Colorectal cancer is the third most common type of cancer in both men and women. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 60 percent of deaths from colorectal cancer can be avoided with routine screenings for men and women starting at age 50.

“Detecting cancer early provides the best hope of a cure,” says Marianne Cusick, M.D., a board-certified general surgeon with fellowship training in colon and rectal surgery who is affiliated with Memorial Hermann Southeast Hospital.

Take the following steps to help reduce your risk for colorectal cancer.

Eat a Healthy Diet
Piling your plate high with fruits and veggies might reduce your risk for colorectal cancer. Plant foods contain nutrients, such as fiber and vitamins A and C, that may stop or reverse cell damage.

Cutting back on meat may further reduce your odds of colorectal cancer. Red meat, meat cooked at high temperatures and processed products like sausage and bacon have all been linked to a greater colorectal cancer risk.

Round out your cancer-prevention diet with fish, whole grains and moderate amounts of low-fat dairy products. A healthy diet can also help keep your weight in check, which may offer further protection. Obesity doubles the risk for colorectal cancer in premenopausal women.

Women: Boost Your Calcium
Besides helping to build strong bones, calcium might also help women decrease the odds for colorectal cancer. One recent study examined more than 45,000 women; those who consumed at least 800 mg of calcium in their diet each day had a 25 percent lower risk for colorectal cancer compared with women who got less than 400 mg a day.

Be Sure to Get Screened
There are several different ways your doctor can screen you for colorectal cancer. Of all the methods, a colonoscopy is the most highly recommended. Your doctor uses a thin, flexible tube to check your colon for ulcers, colon polyps, tumors and areas of inflammation or bleeding.

“Most colorectal cancers begin as growths called polyps,” explains Dr. Cusick. “If your doctor sees polyps during your colonoscopy, the polyps can be removed right then and there.” According to a recent study, this cuts your risk of dying of the disease in half.

Most people should get colonoscopies beginning at age 50. Talk with your doctor about the right timing for you. You may need to have one earlier if you have a family history of colorectal cancer, inflammatory bowel disease or other risk factors, like blood in your stool, constipation or a change in your bowel habits.
Technology has made many things easier and faster in the healthcare field. Now it can help you save time when you need to schedule your next medical appointment. Memorial Hermann Southeast Hospital offers ScheduleNow, a free online scheduling system that enables you to make primary care, mammography and medical specialty appointments, or book your next nutrition or weight management consultation.

Health Care at Your Fingertips
ScheduleNow makes it easy for patients to search physicians, locations and dates, and then quickly book real-time appointments.

“Memorial Hermann has reduced the hassle factor for patients, making scheduling an appointment much more convenient,” says Saul Torres Jr., M.D., a board-certified family medicine physician affiliated with Memorial Hermann Medical Group Pearland Convenient Care Center. “Any time of the day or night, patients can easily book appointments with the click of a mouse – all without busy signals, waiting or being put on hold.”

How It Works
Patients visit memorialhermann.org, select the ScheduleNow icon and choose provider type, service and ZIP code. From there, just follow the prompts to schedule the appointment. You can also narrow your search by time of day, physician gender and years of experience, and language spoken.

ScheduleNow provides appointment reminders via email, as well as a link to a map for directions. Appointments can be made 24/7 from any Internet-connected device.

TRY IT TODAY! To take advantage of ScheduleNow, visit memorialhermann.org. For scheduling questions, call 713.222.CARE (2273).