

The diabetes-cancer connection is no longer speculative; it's a clinically validated reality. For patients, it means being vigilant about lifestyle, medication adherence, and early screenings.

CANCER & DIABETES

Are They Interlinked?

In 2025, the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) estimates that 11.1% of the population (20-79 years) lives with diabetes, which equates to over 852 million people globally. There is a constant increase in number of patients with diabetes.

Research have established that Cancer and diabetes are among the most significant non-communicable diseases globally, and its simultaneous rise has raised questions about a deeper, biological connection. Recent research confirms diabetes, particularly Type 2, increases the risk of various cancers and complicates cancer outcomes. Understanding this link isn't just important, it's essential.



Shared Risk Factors and Underlying Mechanisms

Both diseases share multiple risk factors:

- Age:** Both cancer and diabetes are more common with age.
- Obesity:** Excess fat tissue leads to chronic inflammation and hormonal imbalances.
- Lifestyle habits:** Smoking, alcohol, physical inactivity, and poor diet contribute to both.
- Genetic and epigenetic changes:** These disrupt normal cellular and metabolic functions.

Diabetes creates a pro-cancer environment through:

- Chronic hyperglycemia
- Elevated insulin and IGF-1 levels
- Increased leptin and decreased adiponectin
- Oxidative stress and inflammation

When dysregulated, they can lead to uncontrolled cell division and tumor formation.

Which Cancers Are More Common in Diabetics?

Certain cancers show significantly increased incidence in people with diabetes:

- Liver, pancreatic, and endometrial cancers
- Breast, colon, and bladder cancers

Diabetes, Obesity and Cancer – A link

Obesity is a key mediator in diabetes-cancer link. It triggers:

- High levels of inflammatory cytokines
- Enhanced leptin and reduced adiponectin activity
- Increased bioavailable estrogen, contributing to breast and endometrial cancers

Diabetics often have altered gut flora, leading to:

- Reduced immunity
- Increased carcinogenic byproducts
- Chronic inflammation (e.g., candidiasis linked to oral and intestinal cancers)

Carcinogenesis is a long process. Denying life-saving medications based on unconfirmed long-term risks is not advised, especially for the elderly.

Diabetics also experience:

- More severe neutropenia and infections
- Higher risk of neurotoxicity and nephrotoxicity
- Poor wound healing post-surgery

Final Takeaway: Integrated Care Is the Future

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