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Possible link between diabetes and liver cancer found

Université de Montréal epidemiologist Marie-Claude Rousseau finds clearest link yet between diabetes and liver cancer

Diabetics could face a higher risk of both pancreatic and liver cancer, according to a Université de Montréal researcher who is presenting her team's findings at the Frontiers in Cancer Research Prevention Meeting in Seattle. While the association between diabetes and both pancreatic and liver cancer has been previously documented, the researchers accounted for many factors unavailable in previous studies, making this the most accurate association ever found between diabetes and the incidence of liver cancer.

Lead researcher Dr. Marie-Claude Rousseau, an epidemiologist in the university's Faculty of Medicine, helped discover the increased incidences after studying self-reported medical histories of male cancer patients being treated in Montreal in the 1980s. Patients had been asked many questions in the original interviews, including whether or not they suffered from diabetes and, if so, at what age they had acquired it and what medication they took for the condition.

The team analyzed the association between diabetes and 12 different types of cancer among 3,288 patients, who at the time had been recently diagnosed with cancer, and 509 healthy individuals. Even after factoring in the known determinants of diabetes, namely obesity, those with diabetes were three times more likely to have been struck with liver cancer and twice as likely pancreatic cancer, according to the findings. Rousseau's paper describing the discovery, entitled Diabetes mellitus and cancer risk in a population-based case-control study among men from Montreal, Canada, helps give strength to the contention that the path of biochemical reactions taking place in a diabetic's body could give off indirect cellular-level effects. The association also falls in line with a much larger study, recently published in the American Journal of Epidemiology, which linked diabetes with higher liver cancer mortality rates.

"As an epidemiologist, I'm always reluctant to make any definitive pronouncements about causality. However, our results strongly suggest a link between diabetes and liver cancer," said Rousseau, who is working in her third and final year as a postdoctoral fellow, a position funded by the Canadian Cancer Society.

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About the Université de Montréal

Founded in 1878, the Université de Montréal has 13 faculties and, along with its two affiliated Schools, HEC Montréal and l'École Polytechnique, is Quebec's leading institution of higher learning, second in Canada, and among the best in North America. With a faculty of 2,300 professors and researchers, the university has a student population of close to 55,000, offers more than 550 undergraduate and graduate programs and awards some 3,000 Master's and PhD degrees each year.

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