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HEALTH

New cancer therapy hunts and destroys deadly tumors in major breakthrough study

Off-the-shelf immune cells track and kill pancreatic tumors in preclinical tests

By **Khloe Quill** · Fox News

Published December 1, 2025 7:00am EST

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Scientists at UCLA have developed an "off-the-shelf" cell-based immunotherapy that was able to track down and kill [pancreatic cancer cells](#) even after they had spread to other organs.

In a mouse study, the treatment slowed cancer growth, extended survival and remained effective even within the harsh environment of solid tumors.

"Even when the cancer tries to evade one attack pathway by changing its molecular signature, our therapy is hitting it from multiple other angles at the same time. The tumor simply can't adapt fast enough," lead author Dr. Yanruide Li, a post-doctoral scholar at UCLA, said in a press release.

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UCLA scientists created an off-the-shelf CAR-NKT cell therapy that killed pancreatic tumors in multiple pre-clinical models. (iStock)

NKT cells are naturally compatible with any [immune system](#), which means they can enter the body without causing dangerous reactions, according to the researchers. They can also be mass-produced using any donated blood stem cells.

"One donor could provide sufficient cells for thousands of treatments," potentially offering a more affordable and accessible approach, according to the press release.

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The team tested the therapy in several lab models. These included models where the [cancer was placed](#) directly into the pancreas and others designed to mimic how the disease spreads to other organs, like the liver and lungs.

The CAR-NKT cells were able to push their way into the tumor itself, rather than getting stuck on the outside like many immune treatments do, the researchers found.

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Researchers emphasized that one dose could cost around \$5,000, far lower than personalized CAR-T treatments. (iStock)

Once they got inside the body, these engineered immune cells could spot [cancer cells](#) in several different ways and kill them using multiple built-in attack methods.

[NEW PANCREATIC CANCER TREATMENT 'WAKES UP' IMMUNE CELLS, RESEARCHERS SAY](#)

Most importantly, they stayed active. Many immune cells that enter a solid tumor quickly become overwhelmed and shut down, but these engineered cells kept working instead of burning out, allowing them to continue fighting the cancer for a longer period.

The findings were published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS).

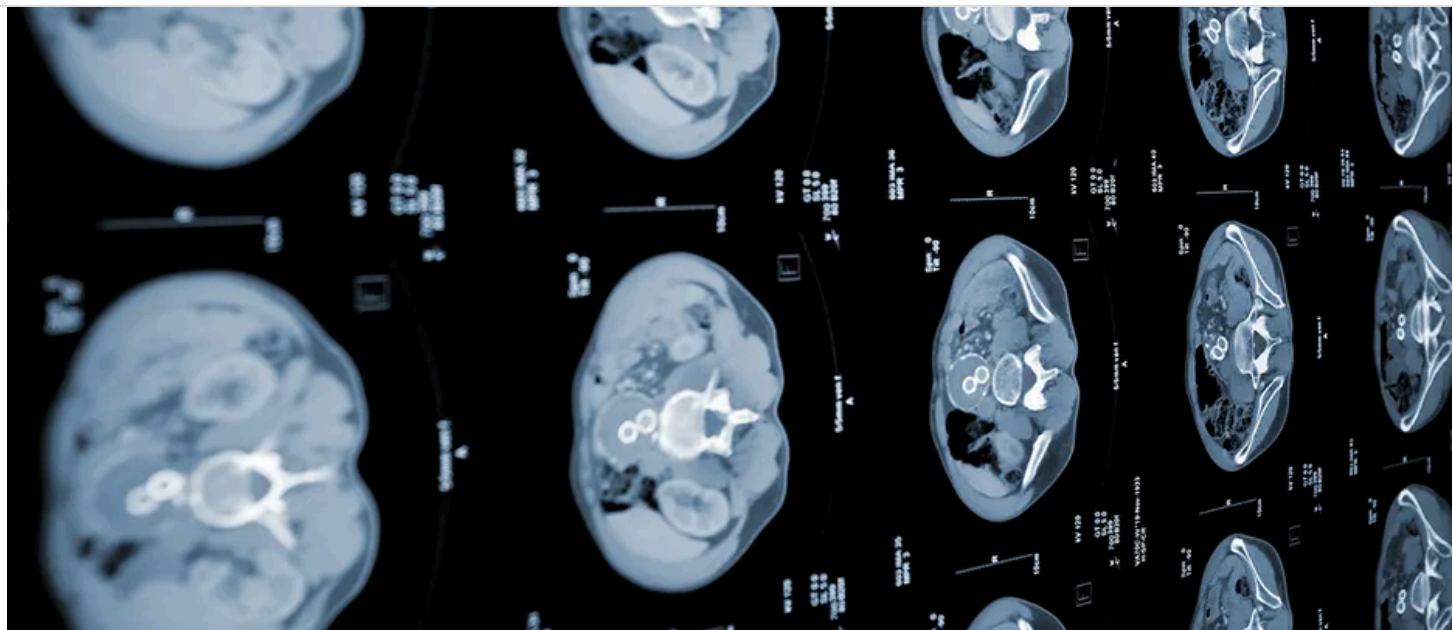
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"Developing a therapy that targets both the primary tumor and its metastases in [pre-clinical studies](#) – one that can be ready to use off-the-shelf – represents a fundamental shift in how we might treat this disease," said senior author Dr. Lili Yang, a professor of microbiology, immunology and molecular genetics at UCLA, in the same press release.

The researchers noted that one dose could cost around \$5,000, far lower than personalized CAR-T treatments.

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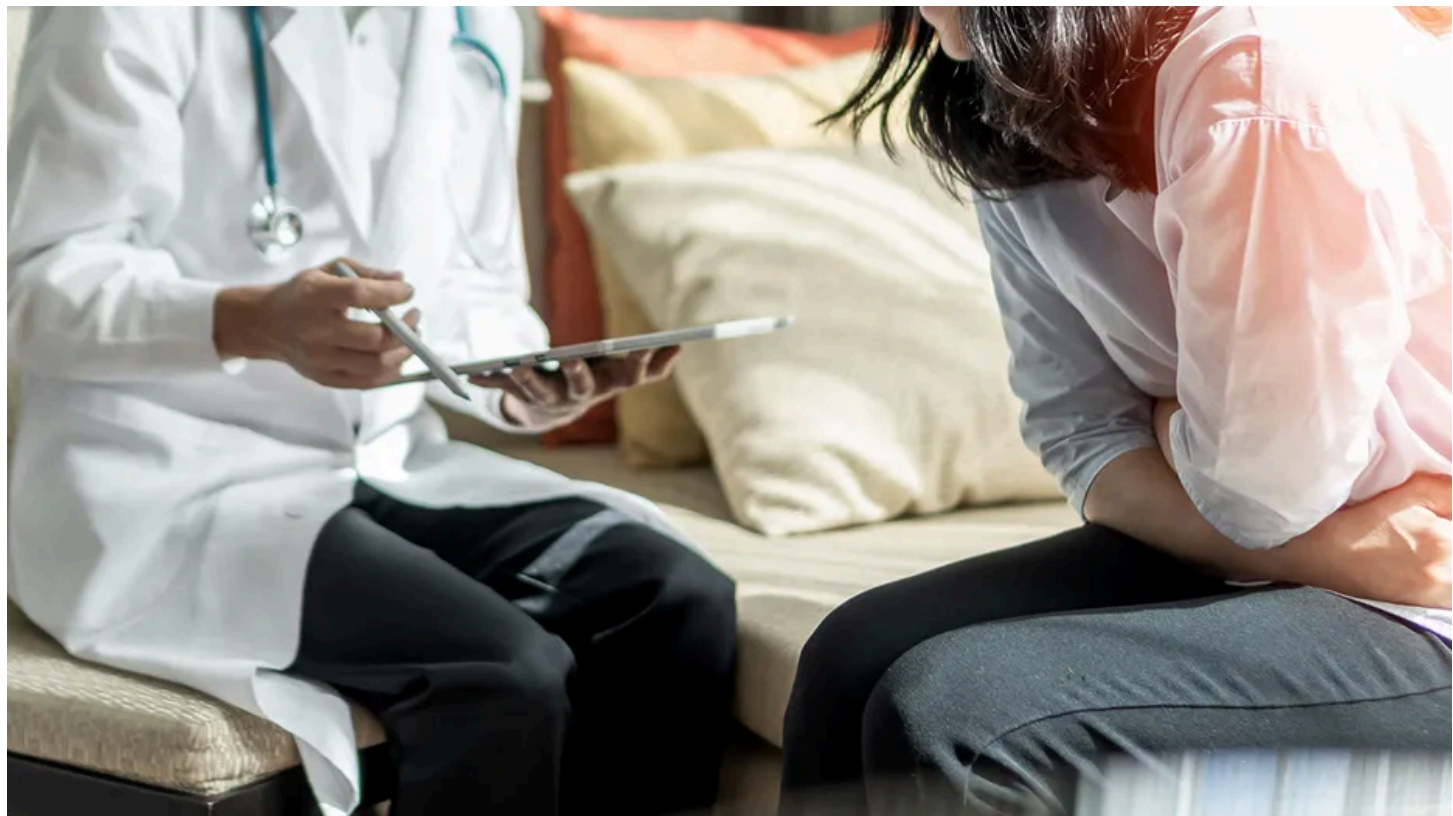
The therapy can be mass-produced from donor stem cells, potentially lowering cost and expanding access. (iStock)

Pancreatic cancer is notoriously aggressive and difficult to treat, according to the researchers. Most patients aren't diagnosed until the disease has already spread, and the tumor's biology creates multiple physical and chemical barriers that weaken the impact of [traditional treatments](#).

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Since the therapy targets a protein that is common in breast, ovarian and lung cancers, the same cell product could potentially treat multiple cancer types.

In separate studies, the team has already demonstrated the therapy's effectiveness against triple-negative [breast cancer](#) and ovarian cancer.



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All testing so far has been done in mice, as the researchers noted that [solid tumors in humans](#) are far more complex. Human tumors can evolve and lose the targets that treatments are designed to recognize, raising the risk of the cancer escaping detection and continuing to grow.

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Long-term safety and side effects in humans are unknown ahead of clinical trials.

The researchers also noted that making big batches of identical, safe cells poses logistical and regulatory challenges.

Khloe Quill is a [lifestyle](#) production assistant with Fox News Digital. She and the lifestyle team cover a range of story topics including food and drink, travel, and health.

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\$ \$&@&\$ 1 day ago ...

My father in law is a stage 4 kidney cancer survivor because of immunotherapy. He's currently not on treatment and cancer free.

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R reddog3162 1 day ago ...

Thank you highlighting how effective immunotherapy's are being developed to treat different types of cancers. Good luck to your father-in-law and the scientists who devote so much of their time and efforts to find cures.

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northernguy2017166 1 day ago ...

I have stage 4 metastatic renal cancer. December 2024 scan showed tumors in a large number of areas.

Started immunotherapy a week later and now, a year later, my latest scan in November 2025 shows the one remaining tumor reduced in size by 60% and all other tumors are resolved, they're completely go...

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u USNMCB17 1 day ago ...

I wish you good luck and healthy life

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s ssbn734 1 day ago ...

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experimental drug at the time and his life was extended 3.5 years. He passed away after that. He was scheduled to pass away 2 months after the original diagnosis. I hear that now this experimenta...

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M mahaw

1 day ago

my mom passed from pancreatic cancer. Im so happy to see advancements. the impact of cancer never leaves those of us left in its wake. RIP mom.

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s some_pulp

1 day ago

My mom, too. I'm so sorry for your loss.

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S some_pulp

1 day ago

This disease took my mother after 8 months. An old friend just lost her husband. And the stories I'm reading here. May this be the breakthrough so many have waited for. And for the ones who lost the battle.

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J jeinarizona

1 day ago

Immune therapy changed my husbands prognosis from 6 months to years. He's doing great. Research is the key.

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1 reply

R RepubliMAGAcn

1 day ago

This is really remarkable news, but still with pancreatic cancer the real issue is early detection. If there were a blood test or AI even that could detect the cancer as early as possible the prognosis changes drastically.

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R riland03

1 day ago

Another thing that would really help with early detection is affordable health insurance.

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1 reply

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tickdoff

1 day ago

My husband died from pancreatic cancer in 2018. Did one round of chemo and radiation but it didn't work. He chose no more treatments and appreciated 8 months of "normal" life including a teaching trip to China, before his last month of hospice care. So happy that now there is a glimmer of hope.

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bsnoone828

1 day ago

I wouldn't be surprised if the pharmaceutical companies suppress or block this breakthrough somehow. Pharmaceutical companies don't like cures, only ongoing lifetime treatments.

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