Pancreatitis

The pancreas is a large gland behind the stomach. The job of the pancreas is to send fluids to the gut to help it:
- break down food
- balance sugar levels in the body

The fluid that helps balance sugar levels is insulin. The fluids that help break down food are digestive enzymes. They are active in the gut. These enzymes are not active in a healthy pancreas. But they can become active in a diseased pancreas. They actually start to break down the pancreas. This is pancreatitis. The pancreas becomes swollen and tender.

Two Kinds of Pancreatitis
1. Acute. This kind happens suddenly. It lasts for a short time. It commonly goes away with simple treatment. It does not often lead to long term problems.
2. Chronic. This kind happens over a long time. It needs special treatment. It can slowly destroy the pancreas is left untreated.

Who is Most at Risk for Pancreatitis?
- Pancreatitis affects men more often than women.
- Pancreatitis affects heavy alcohol users.

Signs
- Pancreatitis commonly starts with a bad pain in the upper belly.
- The pain may get worse when a person lies flat on the back.
- The pain may start after a heavy meal or after drinking alcohol.
• The pain may last for a few days.
• The person may:
  o have a swollen and tender belly
  o feel sick to the stomach
  o throw up
  o sweat
  o have a fever
    o have a yellow color to the skin/whites of the eyes (jaundice)
    o have fatty BMs (stools)
    o have a fast heart rate
    o have low blood pressure
    o feel bloated

Causes
The main causes of pancreatitis in adults are:
• Gallstones that block the pancreatic duct
• Gallbladder disease
• Alcohol use

There are other less common causes:
• Infection from a virus
• A tumor that blocks the pancreatic duct
• A back flow of the contents of the gut into the pancreatic duct
• Damage to the pancreas due to injury or surgery
• Certain medicines (talk to your doctor about them)
• Peptic ulcers
• Crohn’s disease
• Cystic fibrosis
• A disease that can be passed from parents to children

Tests
The doctor may order:
• Lab tests of blood and stool (BM)
• X-rays to look for gallstones and tumors
• Tests that take pictures of the pancreas, such as CT scans or MRIs.
• Laparoscopy. A thin tube is put through a tiny cut. The tube has a camera on the end. It lets the doctor look at the pancreas.
The most serious problems to result from pancreatitis are:
- Abdominal pain
- Low blood pressure
- Heart, kidney, liver failure
- Breathing problems
- Diabetes
- Fluid in the belly
- Pus in the pancreas

Pancreatitis can happen over and over again. **It is a serious illness.** It needs to be treated by a doctor who understands the disease well.

**Treatment**
- A person cannot eat or drink for a few days during the worst stage. This will give the stomach a chance to rest.
- Fluids and antibiotics are fed into the arm by an IV needle.
- A person may get medicine to help with the pain.
- A tube may be passed through the nose into the stomach. This is to help reduce the swelling. It will also decrease the risk of throwing up.
- As the person improves, a liquid diet is started. After more improvement, a person may have a regular diet.
- The doctor may give enzyme pills to replace those lost during the illness.

**Diet at Home**
Stay away from alcohol. Do not smoke. The diet should be:
- Low in fat
- High in protein (meats, fish, chicken, low-fat milk)
- Moderate in carbohydrates (pasta, bread)
- Low in spices and caffeine

Some people may need a diabetic diet. Diabetics will need to learn to check their blood sugar levels.
For More Help Contact:
Rosary Hall Recovery Program (Alcoholism and Drug Dependency)
St. Vincent Charity Hospital
216-363-2580
(Preferred provider for most health care plans)

Alcoholics Anonymous: Cleveland Area
216-241-7387
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org

For More Information on Recovery Programs
Cuyahoga County Drug Board
216-348-4830

Cystic Fibrosis
www.cff.org

How can I find a Doctor?
St. Vincent Charity Hospital has doctors who have special training in pancreatitis. To contact one of our doctors call the:

Physician Referral Line at 1-800-223-8662
Visit our Web site at www.stvincentcharity.com

Our doctors serve with a deep respect for all. Their goal is to give the best care and education whether or not a person can pay.

St. Vincent Charity Hospital  St. Luke’s Health Care Center
2351 E. 22nd Street  11201 Shaker Boulevard
Cleveland, Ohio 44115  Cleveland, Ohio 44104
216-861-6200  216-721-6900
TTY: Ohio Relay 1-800-750-0750

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