



QUESTIONS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ANSWERS

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:
 - have a swollen and tender belly
 - feel sick to the stomach
 - throw up
 - sweat
 - have a fever
 - have a yellow color to the skin/whites of the eyes (jaundice)
 - have fatty BMs (stools)
 - have a fast heart rate
 - have low blood pressure
 - 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.

Problems Resulting from the Disease

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

2351 E. 22nd Street

Cleveland, Ohio 44115

216-861-6200

TTY: Ohio Relay 1-800-750-0750

St. Luke's Health Care Center

11201 Shaker Boulevard

Cleveland, Ohio 44104

216-721-6900

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