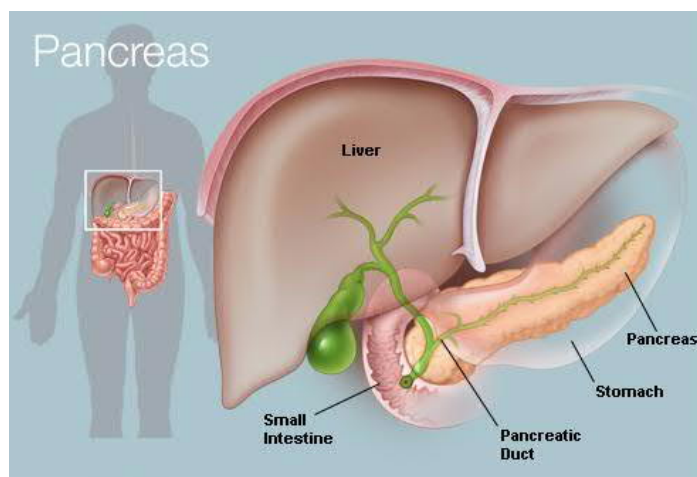


PATIENT INFORMATION

Pancreatitis

The pancreas is a small organ, located behind the stomach, that helps with digestion. Acute pancreatitis is a condition where the pancreas becomes inflamed (swollen) over a short period of time. The two most common causes are gallstones and drinking too much alcohol. Other less common causes are certain medications, infections, an imbalance in certain minerals or fats in the body, or damage to the pancreas, for example during surgery. Sometimes the cause is not identified.



You are more likely to get pancreatitis if you are aged over 70, obese, have 2 or more alcoholic drinks a day, smoke, or have a family history of pancreatitis.

What are the symptoms of pancreatitis?

The main symptom of pancreatitis is upper abdominal (tummy) pain which usually comes on over a few hours. It can often be felt spreading through to the back. Other symptoms include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, high temperature, and feeling generally unwell.

Most people with acute pancreatitis start to feel better within about a week and have no further problems. Around 1 in 5 people develop severe pancreatitis, and some of these people will go on to develop serious complications. It can be life-threatening.

How do you diagnose pancreatitis?

Pancreatitis can be identified from your symptoms and blood tests. Sometimes a CT scan is also performed to confirm it. A thorough medical history and an ultrasound scan of the abdomen are also useful in looking for the cause of pancreatitis.

How do you treat pancreatitis?

Acute pancreatitis is treated in hospital, where you'll be closely monitored for signs of serious problems and given supportive treatment, such as fluids, oxygen, painkillers and nutrition support.

People with mild acute pancreatitis usually start to get better within a week and experience either no further problems, or problems that get better within 48 hours. Many people are well enough to leave hospital after a few days.

Once the condition is under control, the underlying cause may need to be treated, for example having your gallbladder removed or help to cut out alcohol. If alcohol is the cause of your pancreatitis it is very important to stop drinking completely, otherwise it is likely to come back. Quitting smoking will also help to prevent flare ups.

How can I prevent pancreatitis?

Eating a healthy low-fat diet and losing weight will help to prevent gallstones and reduce your risk of pancreatitis. Cutting back on alcohol will also help to prevent damage to the pancreas. Guidelines suggest you should not drink more than 14 units of alcohol per week. A unit of alcohol is equal to about half a pint of normal-strength lager or a pub measure (25ml) of spirits. A small (125ml) glass of wine (ABV 12%) or an alcopop is 1.5 units.

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.