

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ACUTE PANCREATITIS

In the Clinic
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What Is Acute Pancreatitis?

The pancreas is a gland that is located behind the stomach. It makes digestive fluid that helps to break down food. Acute pancreatitis happens when something blocks the flow of this fluid or attacks the tissues of the pancreas, causing it to become irritated and swollen. If not treated quickly, acute pancreatitis can be deadly, so be sure to be evaluated within 24 hours of when symptoms start.



What Are the Symptoms?

- Severe, constant pain in the upper part of your stomach that may spread to your back
- Stomach pain that gets worse after eating
- Nausea and vomiting
- Sweating
- Fever

What Causes It?

The most common causes of acute pancreatitis are gallstones and alcohol use. Other causes, such as elevated blood fat levels, medications, and autoimmune diseases, are much less common.

Am I at Risk?

Factors that put you at higher risk for acute pancreatitis include:

- Having gallstones
- Long-term, heavy alcohol use
- Taking certain medicines
- Having high levels of fat in your blood
- Having problems with the pancreas since birth

How Is It Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will perform a physical examination and check your vital signs. He or she will review any medicines you take and ask about factors that may put you at risk for pancreatitis. This will include asking about your alcohol or tobacco use.
- Blood tests will be used to check for signs of pancreatitis.

- Imaging tests, such as an x-ray or ultrasound, may be used to look at your pancreas and check for causes of pancreatitis (like gallstones).
- More advanced imaging tests and interventions may be necessary if you are very sick or do not improve in the hospital.

How Is It Treated?

- Most patients with acute pancreatitis need to be hospitalized. Most people feel better within a week and can leave the hospital. Recovery may take longer in more serious cases.
- While in the hospital, you may need to stop eating for a few days while your pancreas gets better.
- Your doctor may give you medicines to help with your pain. Fluids will be given through your veins to keep you hydrated.
- You may need treatment for what is causing the problem, such as surgery to remove a gallstone or your gallbladder.
- After an episode of acute pancreatitis, it is important to avoid anything that can cause another episode, such as alcohol, tobacco, certain medicines, and fatty foods.

Questions for My Doctor

- What caused my pancreatitis?
- What kind of tests do I need?
- Could this happen again? How can I prevent it from happening again?
- What food and drinks should I stay away from?
- Should I see other doctors?

For More Information



MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/pancreatitis.html>

National Pancreas Foundation

<https://pancreasfoundation.org/patient-information/acute-pancreatitis>