

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ACUTE PANCREATITIS

In the Clinic
Annals of Internal Medicine

What is acute pancreatitis?

- The pancreas is a gland that lies behind the stomach and produces fluid that goes into the small intestine to break down food.
- Acute pancreatitis occurs when something blocks the flow of this fluid or attacks the tissues of the pancreas.
- Severe acute cases can be fatal.

What are symptoms of acute pancreatitis?

- Severe, constant pain in the upper abdomen may spread to the back.
- Nausea and vomiting can occur.
- Sweating, fast heart rate, and fever can occur.

Who gets acute pancreatitis?

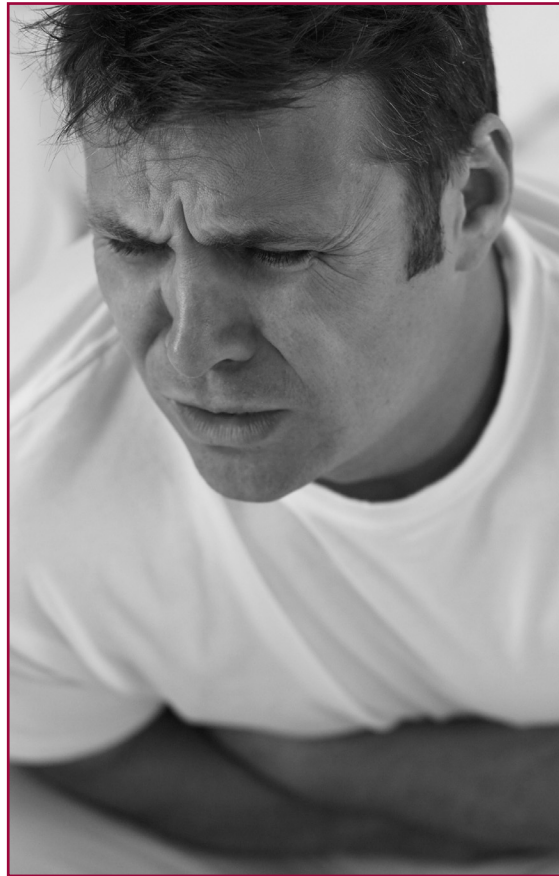
- People with gallstone disease or who use alcohol heavily are at risk.
- Other, less common causes include some medications, injury to the pancreas, high triglyceride levels (often checked with cholesterol), and pancreas deformities from birth.
- Men are at higher risk than women.

How is it diagnosed?

- Your doctor will ask you about risk factors for acute pancreatitis, review your medications, and examine your stomach area as well as check your vital signs.
- Your doctor will order blood tests of enzymes from the pancreas among other tests and do X-ray or ultrasonography studies.
- Common tests used to diagnose acute pancreatitis include ultrasonography, computed tomography (CT) scan, and endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP), which examines the pancreas through a tube inserted down the throat into the stomach and pancreas.

How is it treated?

- Hospitalization is necessary for nearly all patients with acute pancreatitis. Sometimes intensive care is needed.



- While in the hospital and under physician care, you may need to stop eating for a few days to rest the pancreas.
- Pain medications and intravenous fluids are often needed.
- Treatment may be needed for the underlying cause, such as for alcohol use or surgery to clear a bile duct blocked by a gallstone.
- It is important to avoid anything that can cause pancreatitis after an episode, such as alcohol, certain medications, or foods that increase triglyceride levels in order to prevent the disease from coming back.

For More Information

<http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/pancreatitis/>
<http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/ercp/>
National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
information on acute pancreatitis and ERCP.

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000287.htm
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/spanish/ency/article/000287.htm
Information on acute pancreatitis in English and in Spanish from
the National Library of Medicine's MEDLINE Plus.

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