

GI Hub

Pancreatitis Patient Guide

Pancreatitis is a condition where the pancreas, an organ in your abdomen that helps with digestion and blood sugar control, becomes inflamed. There are two main types: **acute pancreatitis** (sudden inflammation) and **chronic pancreatitis** (long-term inflammation).

Causes

- **Acute pancreatitis** is most often caused by gallstones (small stones in the gallbladder) or heavy alcohol use. Other causes include certain medications, high levels of fat in the blood (triglycerides), infections, autoimmune disease and sometimes unknown reasons. [\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#)
- **Chronic pancreatitis** usually develops after repeated episodes of acute pancreatitis, but can also be caused by long-term alcohol use, smoking, genetic factors, or sometimes for unknown reasons. [\[4\]](#)[\[5\]](#)

Symptoms

- **Acute pancreatitis**: Sudden severe upper belly pain, often spreading to the back, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes fever. [\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#)
- **Chronic pancreatitis**: Ongoing or repeated belly pain, weight loss, and greasy, foul-smelling stools due to trouble digesting food. [\[5\]](#)

Diagnosis

Doctors diagnose pancreatitis by:

- Asking about symptoms and medical history.
- Blood tests to check for high levels of digestive enzymes (amylase or lipase).
- Imaging tests like ultrasound, CT scan, or MRI to look at the pancreas and check for complications. [\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#)[\[5\]](#)[\[6\]](#)

Treatment

- **Acute pancreatitis**: Most people need to stay in the hospital for fluids through an IV, pain control, and early feeding (usually by mouth). Treating the cause is important—removing

gallstones or stopping alcohol. Antibiotics are only used if there is an infection. Surgery or procedures may be needed for complications.[\[2\]\[7\]\[8\]](#)

- **Chronic pancreatitis:** Treatment focuses on relieving pain, stopping alcohol and smoking, taking medicines to help digest food, and sometimes using antioxidants. Managing diabetes and other complications is also important.[\[4\]\[5\]](#)

Complications

- **Acute pancreatitis** can lead to serious problems like infection, organ failure, or fluid collections in the belly. Most cases are mild, but severe cases can be life-threatening.[\[1\]\[2\]\[9\]](#)

- **Chronic pancreatitis** can cause long-term pain, trouble digesting food, weight loss, and diabetes. It also increases the risk of pancreatic cancer.[\[4\]\[5\]](#)

Prevention and Follow-Up

- Avoiding alcohol and smoking, treating gallstones, and managing high triglycerides can help prevent pancreatitis or keep it from coming back.[\[2\]\[5\]](#)

- Regular follow-up with your doctor is important to monitor for complications and manage symptoms.

If you have questions or new symptoms, contact your healthcare provider right away.

References

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