

Most people with acute pancreatitis suffer severe abdominal pain and are admitted to hospital. The doctor usually makes the diagnosis using a blood test that measures amylase in your blood. This is a chemical produced by the pancreas. Other tests are usually done at the same time including further blood tests, a chest x-ray and for young women a pregnancy test. These tests are looking for other causes of severe abdominal pain.

Once the diagnosis of acute pancreatitis has been made, the initial treatment includes painkillers, fluids through a drip and often oxygen therapy. The doctors and nurses will monitor you by measuring your pulse, blood pressure and further blood tests that help decide if the pancreatitis is mild or severe. Most episodes are mild. However, severe pancreatitis carries a risk of your lungs, kidneys or heart not working well. If you have severe pancreatitis, you may be transferred to the High Dependency Unit for closer monitoring and supportive treatment.

The inflammation of the pancreas, whether it is mild or severe, usually settles down by itself and the pain fades away usually over a few days.

What causes acute pancreatitis?

In Britain, acute pancreatitis is usually caused by either gallstones or drinking alcohol. Soon after your admission to hospital, the doctor will arrange an ultrasound test to look for gallstones. Please tell the doctor honestly how much alcohol you normally drink since this makes it easier for you to be given the best possible care during your hospital stay.

Acute pancreatitis due to gallstones

Once the acute pancreatitis has settled, you will usually be advised to have treatment for gallstones. It is important to make sure there are no gallstones in the bile duct (the tube draining your liver, that passes your pancreas) and this may be done either by special imaging using a MR scan or by a flexible tube examination of the bile duct called an ERCP, which can usually remove the stones at the same time. If you also have gallstones in your gallbladder, you should discuss with the doctor whether it would be a good idea to have an operation to remove the stones and the gallbladder (cholecystectomy).

Acute pancreatitis due to alcohol

Some people are very sensitive to the effects of alcohol. If alcohol has caused you to develop pancreatitis, you should really stop drinking completely. If you continue to drink any alcohol, you are at risk of further episodes of acute pancreatitis or possibly chronic pancreatitis. If this happens, you may get constant severe pain and may develop diabetes

needing Insulin treatment. If you need help to stop drinking, please contact.....(add alcohol advisory service number)

Complications of acute pancreatitis

A small number of people with acute pancreatitis develop complications. Most of these involve persistent pain and may need further treatment by endoscopy (this is a flexible tube examination through your stomach) or surgery. Complications the doctor looks out for include chronic pancreatitis, pseudocyst formation, and pancreatic necrosis. If your pancreatitis is not settling after five days, the doctor will usually request a CT scan to look for any signs of pancreatic necrosis (death of pancreatic tissue).

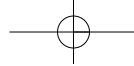
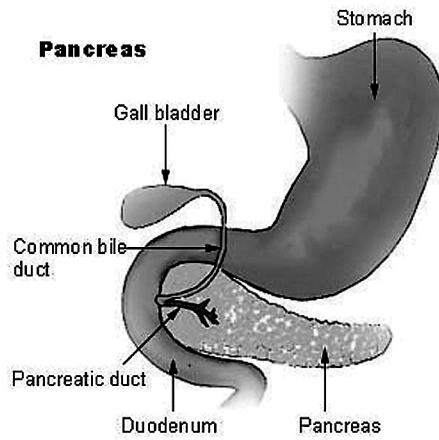


diagram of pancreas and bile duct.



Conclusion

For most people with acute pancreatitis, the pain settles within a few days of admission to hospital and you can go home. If the pain was caused by gallstones, these may need to be removed. If the pain was due to drinking alcohol, you should stop drinking completely, since even small amounts of alcohol can bring the pain back again.

Patient Information

Acute Pancreatitis

