

## A Digestive Disease - PANCREATITIS

The pancreas is a large gland located behind the stomach and next to the duodenum (the first section of the small intestine). The pancreas has two primary functions:

- ✚ To secrete powerful digestive enzymes into the small intestine to aid the digestion of carbohydrates, proteins and fat.
- ✚ To release the hormones insulin and glucagon into the bloodstream. These hormones are involved in blood glucose metabolism, regulating how the body stores and uses food for energy.

Pancreatitis is a disease in which the pancreas becomes inflamed. Pancreatic damage occurs when the digestive enzymes are activated before they are secreted into the duodenum and begin attacking the pancreas.

### THERE ARE TWO FORMS OF PANCREATITIS: ACUTE AND CHRONIC

#### ✚ Acute Pancreatitis

Acute pancreatitis is a sudden inflammation that occurs over a short period of time. In the majority of cases, acute pancreatitis is caused by gallstones or heavy alcohol use. Other causes include medications, infections, trauma, metabolic disorders, and surgery. In about 10% to 15% of people that have acute pancreatitis, the cause is unknown.

#### ✚ Chronic Pancreatitis

Chronic Pancreatitis occurs most commonly after an episode of acute pancreatitis and is the result of ongoing inflammation of the pancreas. In more than 70% of the cases, chronic pancreatitis is caused by prolonged alcohol use. Other, less common causes include metabolic disorders. Very rarely, patients have chronic pancreatitis that tends to run in families (hereditary pancreatitis). Damage to the pancreas from excessive alcohol use may not cause the symptoms for many years, but then the person may suddenly develop severe pancreatitis symptoms, including severe pain and this may result in problems with digestion and blood sugar abnormalities.

People with chronic pancreatitis are usually men between the ages of 30 to 45, but chronic pancreatitis may occur in females as well. Can Pancreatitis be prevented? Since most cases of pancreatitis are caused by alcohol abuse, prevention is directed at responsible drinking, or no drinking at all. If heavy drinking is a concern, talk to your doctor or health care provider about a referral to an alcohol treatment center. In addition, you may benefit from a support group or getting the family involved.

If you would like more information, please contact  
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