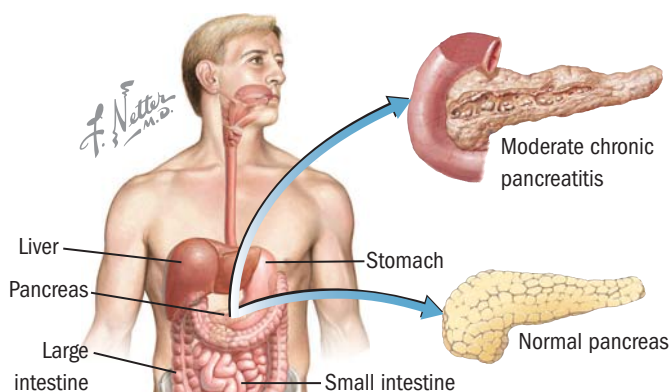


MANAGING YOUR CHRONIC PANCREATITIS

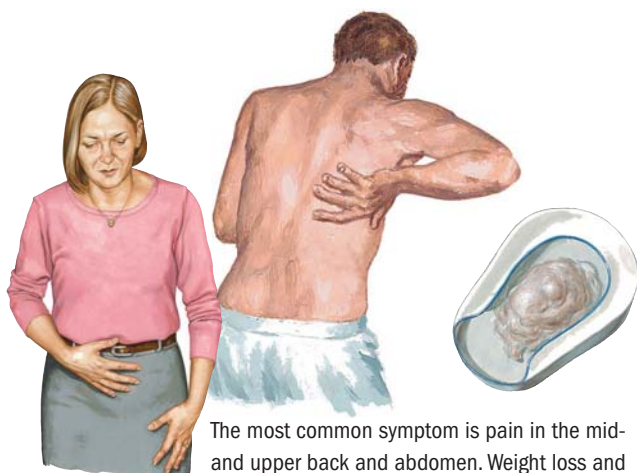


The pancreas is in the abdomen, surrounded by the stomach, intestines, and other organs. Pancreatitis is inflammation (swelling) of the pancreas.



Chronic pancreatitis isn't common. Men are affected more often than women.

Alcohol abuse is the major cause.



The most common symptom is pain in the mid- and upper back and abdomen. Weight loss and large, foul, bulky bowel movements (steatorrhea) also occur because of poor fat absorption.

What Is Chronic Pancreatitis?

The pancreas is a gland in the abdomen (belly), surrounded by the stomach, intestines, and other organs. It makes substances called pancreatic juices (containing digestive enzymes) and the hormones insulin and glucagon.

Pancreatitis is inflammation (swelling) of the pancreas. It occurs when these digestive enzymes begin attacking the pancreas. Pancreatitis can be acute (occurs suddenly). Continuing injury to the pancreas may lead to a long-lasting (chronic) form. The pancreas doesn't make its enzymes, causing an inability to digest and absorb fat in the diet. Insulin production also decreases.

Chronic pancreatitis isn't common. More men than women are affected. Pancreatitis cannot be caught.

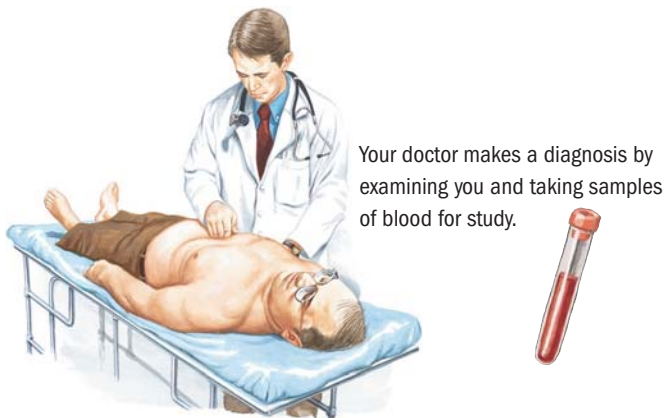
What Causes Chronic Pancreatitis?

Alcohol abuse is the major cause. Other causes are hemochromatosis (too much iron in the blood) and cystic fibrosis. Sometimes the cause is unknown.

What Are the Symptoms of Chronic Pancreatitis?

The most common symptom is pain in the mid- and upper back and abdomen that varies in intensity. It may be a low-grade, lasting pain with repeated acute attacks. The pain may be constant and severe.

Another symptom is weight loss, which occurs because the body cannot absorb fat properly (malabsorption). Large, foul, bulky bowel movements, or stools (called steatorrhea) occur because of this problem with fat absorption. People can also have a distended abdomen and fever.



Your doctor makes a diagnosis by examining you and taking samples of blood for study.



Pain is treated with nonnarcotic pain relievers. Insulin injections are used to control blood sugar levels.



Eat a low-fat, well-balanced diet. Take fat-soluble vitamins and calcium supplements.



Avoid fatty foods, alcohol, and caffeinated beverages. Call your doctor if you can't control pain or you get a fever.



How Is Chronic Pancreatitis Diagnosed?

The doctor diagnoses chronic pancreatitis by reviewing the medical history and doing a physical examination. Samples of blood are studied for signs of this disease. A CT scan or ultrasound of the abdomen may also be done to exclude other causes of your symptoms.

How Is Chronic Pancreatitis Treated?

The first treatment goal is to manage pain, usually by using nonnarcotic pain relievers. Referral to a pain specialist may help. In rare cases, if pain cannot be controlled, surgery is a possibility. Surgery involves draining the pancreatic duct (tube connecting the pancreas and bile duct). In advanced cases, all or part of the pancreas can be removed.

The second goal is replacing digestive enzymes and insulin that the pancreas normally makes. In severe cases, insulin replacement may also be necessary. Pancreatic enzymes, as tablets, are taken with meals and snacks. Insulin injections are used to control the blood sugar (glucose) level. Supplements of vitamins A, D, and K may be needed because of poor absorption.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Chronic Pancreatitis:

- ✓ **DO** eat a low-fat, well-balanced diet.
- ✓ **DO** take oral fat-soluble vitamin supplements and calcium supplements.
- ✓ **DO** take pancreatic enzyme supplements as prescribed.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you cannot control pain with prescribed drugs. See a pain specialist if pain control is difficult.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you get symptoms of pancreatitis or symptoms worsen or don't improve with treatment.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you get a fever.
- ⊗ **DON'T** eat fatty foods.
- ⊗ **DON'T** drink alcohol or caffeinated beverages.
- ⊗ **DON'T** use narcotics for pain control for long periods.

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- American Gastroenterological Association
Tel: (301) 654-2055
Website: <http://www.gastro.org>
- National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse
Tel: (800) 891-5389
Website: <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/digest/nddic.htm>