

General Surgery

Acute Pancreatitis Information for Patients

What is the pancreas?

The pancreas is an organ that is responsible for producing various chemicals to help digest food and control blood glucose. It is surrounded by the stomach, small intestine, spleen, and liver and has 3 main parts, the head, body and tail.

Acute pancreatitis occurs when the pancreas becomes inflamed, when something blocks the flow of chemicals or attacks the tissue of the pancreas.

Who gets pancreatitis?

- People with gallstone disease
- There is a clear link between acute pancreatitis and people who use alcohol heavily

Other causes include:

- Medication
- Injury during a procedure
- Medical conditions
- High lipid levels
- Viral infections

What are the symptoms?

- Severe, constant pain in the upper abdomen that can radiate to the back
- Nausea and vomiting, loss of appetite
- Diarrhoea
- Fever, sweating and fast heart rate,
- Occasionally jaundice (yellowing of the skin)

Acute pancreatitis is a serious condition and can be either:

Mild: Although mild pancreatitis will make you feel very unwell, patients usually recover without any complications within three to five days.

Severe: The inside of the pancreas becomes severely inflamed leading to death of tissue that can trigger life threatening complications such as inflammation and infection spreading throughout the rest of the body.

Treating Acute Pancreatitis

Complications of acute pancreatitis can develop quickly, in order to maintain your wellbeing you will be required to stay in hospital and may be given the following supportive treatment.

Oxygen: You will be given oxygen, usually through small tubes into your nose (nasal cannulae) to make sure that your vital organs have enough oxygen to function effectively. This is removable and is usually used until your condition improves.

In severe circumstances a mask or ventilation equipment may be used to assist you with your breathing, if this is required you may be transferred to a high dependency ward.

Painkillers: Acute pancreatitis can be extremely painful. You will be given regular strong medication to help settle the pain. Sometimes these painkillers can make you feel drowsy.

Fluids: The body can become dehydrated quickly and send your body into shock; to prevent this you will be given fluid (a drip) through your vein using a tube called a cannula. The amount of fluid you are given will be monitored closely. It may be necessary to monitor your urine output closely using measuring containers or inserting a urethral catheter.

Nutrition: You will be asked not to eat until the inflammation in the pancreas has settled down. This is because trying to digest solid foods could place unnecessary strain on the pancreas.

If you need to avoid food for a long period, a feeding tube may be used to provide you with the nutrients your body needs. This will involve inserting a fine tube into your stomach through your nose (nasogastric tube).

Prevention: The risk of further bouts of pancreatitis can be reduced by making changes to your diet and lifestyle.

- Avoid or limit alcohol (recommendations suggest that men and women should not drink more than 14 units of alcohol evenly spaced throughout the week with at least 2 alcohol free days)
- Eat a balanced, low fat diet
- Try to maintain a healthy weight through regular exercise

Who can I contact if I am concerned after discharge?

Please contact the Surgical Assessment Unit (SAU) on 01274 383253 if you have any concerns or experience any of the following symptoms once discharged.

- Recurrence of symptoms of pain, high temperature (over 38°C) or chills, persistent nausea or vomiting, jaundice.

A member of the medical team should be available to reassure and advise you. The SAU is open 24 hours a day.

Smoking: Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is a smoke-free organisation. You are not permitted to smoke or use e-cigarettes in any of the hospital buildings or grounds.

Wristbands: When you are in hospital it is essential to wear a wristband at all times to ensure your safety during your stay.

The wristband will contain accurate details about you on it including all of the essential information that staff need to identify you correctly and give you the right care. All hospital patients including babies, children and older people should wear the wristband at all times.

If you do not have a wristband whilst in hospital, then please ask a member of staff for one. If it comes off or is uncomfortable, ask a member of staff to replace it.

By Textphone: We use Next Generation Text for people with hearing difficulties.

To contact us ring 18001 followed by the number you require.

The trust is working towards achieving the Accessible Information Standard. If you need this information in another format or language, please ask a member of staff.