

Pancreatitis is on the rise among Americans, but thanks to advanced treatments, the mortality rate is decreasing. At Pioneer GI Clinic in Anchorage, Alaska, the group of board-certified gastroenterologists includes Nicolas Villa, MD, who has specialized expertise and training in pancreatitis treatment, and is ready to help. They use the most advanced diagnostic and treatment protocols to manage your pain and improve your quality of life.

## **What is pancreatitis?**

Pancreatitis is also called inflammation of the pancreas. Your pancreas, which is just behind your stomach, is a gland that makes enzymes and hormones to help with digestion and glucose metabolism.

There are two types of pancreatitis, acute and chronic. Acute pancreatitis starts suddenly and lasts for a few days. Chronic pancreatitis happens slowly over a long period of time.

## **What are the symptoms of pancreatitis?**

Acute pancreatitis can cause:

- Upper abdominal pain
- Pain that shoots from your abdomen to your back
- Tender abdomen
- Fever
- Nausea
- Vomiting

Chronic pancreatitis can cause either sporadic or constant upper abdominal pain. You may also experience greasy stools and unexpected weight loss.

## **What causes pancreatitis?**

Gallstones — hardened pieces of bile that sit in your gallbladder — are the most common cause of acute pancreatitis. As the stones move, they can get lodged in a pancreatic or bile duct, which then leads to inflammation.

The most common cause of chronic pancreatitis is heavy drinking. Genetic disorders, blockages caused by pancreatic cancer, and high levels of triglycerides and calcium in the blood can also lead to chronic pancreatitis.

Sometimes, the cause of pancreatitis is unclear.

## **How is pancreatitis diagnosed?**

A pancreatitis diagnosis starts with a physical exam and a review of your medical history.

Some of the most common tests to diagnose pancreatitis include blood and stool tests, as well as imaging exams like abdominal ultrasounds, computed tomography (CT) scans, and magnetic resonance cholangiopancreatography (MRCP).

## **How is pancreatitis treated?**

The specific treatment depends on the cause of your pancreatitis. Some of the main approaches to pancreatitis include:

- Bland diet and clear liquids
- Intravenous (IV) fluids, if dehydrated
- Pain medication
- Enzyme supplements or vitamin supplements with meals
- Insulin use, if you have diabetes
- Gallstone removal with endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP)
- Cholecystectomy (surgical gallbladder removal)

If excessive alcohol use causes pancreatitis, stopping drinking is the most important thing you can do for your health. Stopping smoking is also very helpful for your overall health and preventing pancreatitis recurrence.

At Pioneer GI Clinic, the dedicated gastroenterologists use their specialized skills to find the cause of your pancreatitis and then prescribe a personalized plan to recover your health.