

# Let's Talk About...

## Pancreatitis

### What is pancreatitis?

Pancreatitis [PAN-cree-ah-TIE-tuss] occurs when the pancreas (organ that helps the body digest food) becomes irritated and inflamed and does not work right.

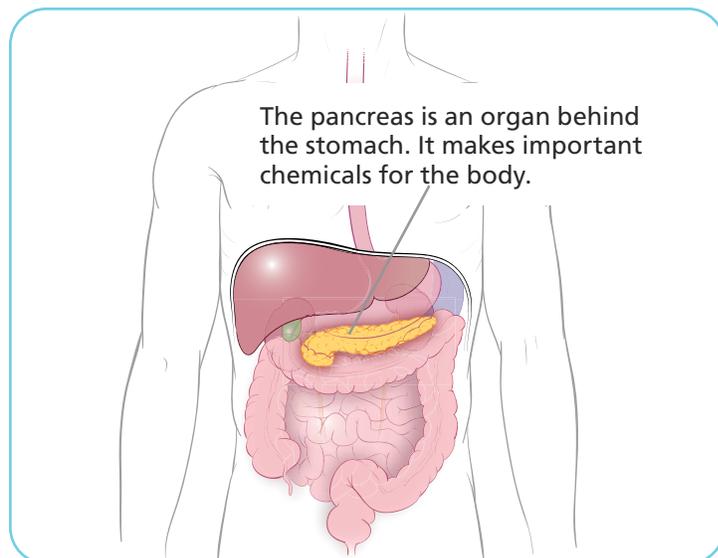
The pancreas makes two enzymes (special chemicals that help break down food): amylase [AM-ill-ace] and lipase [LIE-pace]. Normally, these enzymes work after they leave the pancreas. If your child has pancreatitis, the enzymes start to work while still in the pancreas. As a result, they start to inflame the pancreas.

### What are the symptoms of pancreatitis?

The most common symptom of pancreatitis is severe pain that usually starts or gets worse after eating. It may come on suddenly or increase slowly.

Other symptoms of pancreatitis may include:

- Nausea (feeling like throwing up)
- Vomiting
- Fever or chills
- Tender stomach
- Lethargy [LETH-ar-jee], or feeling very tired
- Crankiness
- Feeling like the heart is racing



### What causes pancreatitis?

Pancreatitis can be caused by:

- Trauma (like a blow or hit) to the pancreas
- A plugged pancreatic duct (little tube that lets enzymes flow into the intestines)
- Severe illness or infection
- An abnormally formed pancreas

Your child may also be more likely to have pancreatitis if they have a family history of the disease.

### How is pancreatitis diagnosed?

Pancreatitis is usually diagnosed with a blood test that measures the amount of amylase and lipase in the blood. Children with pancreatitis have much more of these two enzymes in their blood than normal.

To take detailed images of your child's pancreas, the doctor may order an ultrasound, computed tomography (CT) scan, or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan.

## How is pancreatitis treated?

To treat pancreatitis, your child's healthcare provider may:

- Give them fluids and pain medicine through an IV (tiny tube inserted into a vein).
- Change your child's diet so the pancreas can rest from digestion (usually changing to low-fat meals).
- Have your child stop eating by mouth for a while and take a special food mixture called total parenteral [pah-REN-tehr-ull] nutrition, or TPN. They may receive TPN through:
  - A nasogastric [NAY-zo-GAS-trick], or NG, tube through the nose and into the stomach
  - A nasojejunal [NAY-zo-jeh-JOO-nul], or NJ, tube through the nose and into the intestine
  - A peripherally [per-IF-er-ul-lee] inserted central catheter, or PICC, line (special IV in the arm, leg, or neck)
- Put an NG tube in your child's nose to remove stomach fluids and keep it empty.

## How long does pancreatitis last?

Pancreatitis symptoms usually last about 1 week. However, your child may not have to stay in the hospital that long. They may have treatments at home if they are:

- Eating enough on their own
- Drinking enough liquids so they don't get dehydrated
- Taking pain medicine by mouth

Most children begin feeling better within 1 to 2 days after starting treatment.

### Where can I learn more?

To learn more about pancreatitis, visit the National Pancreas Foundation website ([pancreasfoundation.org](http://pancreasfoundation.org)). Click on the **Patient Information** tab and select **Pediatric Pancreatitis**.

## Questions for my doctor

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