

## Who can I contact if I have a problem when I get home?

If you experience any problems related to your surgery or admission once you have been discharged home. Please feel free to contact wards 4A, 4B or 4C for advice from the nurse in charge. They will assist you via the telephone, advise you return to your GP or ask you to make your way to A&E at Whiston Hospital depending upon the nature of your concern.

Ward 4A – 0151 430 1420

Ward 4B – 0151 430 1637

Ward 4C – 0151 430 1643

Whiston Hospital  
Warrington Road,  
Prescot, Merseyside, L35 5DR  
Telephone: 0151 426 1600



/sthknhs



@sthk.nhs

[www.sthk.nhs.uk](http://www.sthk.nhs.uk)

# Acute Pancreatitis Information

This leaflet can be made available  
in alternative languages / formats on request.

如有需要，本传单可提供其他语言/版式  
此單張的其他語言/格式版本可按要求提供

Na żądanie ta ulotka może zostać udostępniona  
w innych językach/formatach.

**Author:** Ward Manager  
**Department:** General Surgery  
**Document Number:** STHK1723  
**Version:** 1  
**Review date:** 01 / 09 / 2024

## What is pancreatitis?

The pancreas is a tadpole-shaped organ located behind the stomach and below the ribcage. It has two important functions:

**It produces digestive juices that are used by the intestines to help digest food.**

**It produces chemicals called hormones including insulin, which regulates the levels of sugar in the blood.**

Acute pancreatitis is a serious condition where the pancreas becomes inflamed. Acute pancreatitis can either be:

**Mild** – which accounts for four out of five cases where the inflamed pancreas usually improves within three to five days. However, mild acute pancreatitis will still make you feel very ill. It is termed 'mild' because the person recovers without any complications.

**Severe** – which accounts for the remaining one in five cases. The inside of the pancreas is severely inflamed which can trigger two life-threatening complications – inflammation can spread throughout the body or the tissues of the pancreas begin to die and become infected which can cause a life-threatening infection to spread throughout the body.

## Risk factors

Sometimes a gallstone can move out of the gallbladder and block the openings (ducts) to the pancreas.

It is **thought** that the blockage causes a disruption in the chemical reactions that occur within the pancreas leading to acute pancreatitis, patients at risk include:

- Being aged 70 years or over
- Smokers
- Being overweight – a person is considered overweight if they have a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or above.

**Signs and symptoms** - Upper abdominal pain radiating to the back, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite. A high fever. Yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes (jaundice) – a less common symptom.

**Alcohol consumption** – there is a definite link between alcohol use and acute pancreatitis, and the more alcohol you drink, the higher your risk.

## Gall stones

## Treatment

You will not be able to eat until the inflammation inside your pancreas has settled down, which usually takes around five days. This is because trying to digest solid food could place too much strain on your pancreas. You will therefore be given intravenous fluids via a drip and because pancreatitis can damage your lungs you may be given oxygen to breathe. The pain associated with even mild cases of acute pancreatitis is severe you may require care in a high dependency or intensive care setting.

If the pancreatitis is shown to be caused by a gallstone, surgical removal of the gallbladder will usually be recommended. This may be done while you are in hospital or, alternatively, the surgery may be planned for a number of weeks in the future.

You may be given a procedure called an ERCP (Endoscopic Retrograde Cholangiopancreatography) in the meantime to remove any gallstones that are causing the pancreatitis. All patients who have had acute pancreatitis should avoid alcohol completely for at least six months, whatever the cause of the pancreatitis. This is because alcohol can cause further damage to the pancreas during the recovery period.

## Students

There may be students present during your consultation as part of their on-going training. Please let the staff know if you wish to be seen by a doctor only.