

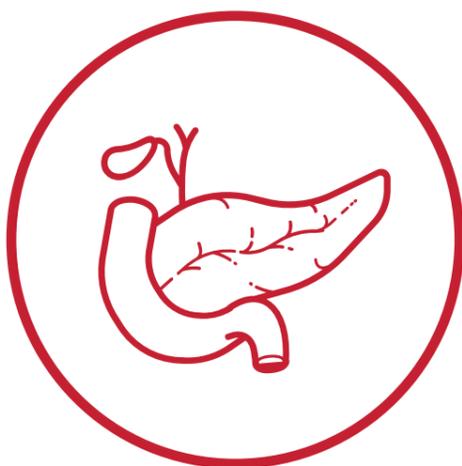
# ADVANTAGE

## Pancreatitis



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### What is the pancreas?



The pancreas is a large gland in the upper part of the abdomen, located beneath the stomach

### What causes pancreatitis?

-  Alcohol
-  Genetic Diseases
-  Gallstones
-  Cancer
-  Trauma
-  Surgery
-  Infections

### How it is diagnosed?

Physical examination



Blood tests



Abdominal ultrasound



## Questions

for Dr Thapelo Motshudi

### 1 What is the pancreas?

The pancreas is a large gland in the upper part of the abdomen, located beneath the stomach. It is part of the digestive system and produces juices that help break down fat, carbohydrates and proteins in the food we eat. One of these substances is called amylase. It also produces two hormones called insulin and glucagon, which control the amount of sugar, or glucose, in the blood. Insulin lowers the amount of sugar in the blood if it is too high, and glucagon helps increase it if too low. Abnormalities of the pancreas are therefore central to the development of diabetes.

### 2 What is pancreatitis?

Pancreatitis results when the digestive enzymes produced within the gland damage and destroy parts of the gland. If the attack happens once and the organ eventually heals, then it is called acute pancreatitis. However, it is considered to be chronic if the problem keeps on recurring, leading to permanent loss of function of parts of the gland.

### 3 What causes it?

There are a number of conditions that can lead to the damage of pancreatic cells. The most common are alcohol, gallstones and some medications. Other causes include trauma, infections, genetic diseases, cancer and surgery. It is however important to note that in a considerable number of cases an obvious cause cannot be found.

### 4 How does it present?

Patients with acute pancreatitis present with pain in the upper part of the abdomen, starting suddenly and slowly and then becoming severe over time. The pain can radiate to the back, with associated nausea, vomiting and occasionally accompanied by diarrhoea. Depending on the severity and stage of the disease the affected person might also experience fever, a very fast heart rate and weakness. The age of onset is generally dependent on the cause, however a general rule of thumb is that alcohol is the most common cause of acute pancreatitis amongst men, while gallstones are mainly responsible in females.

### 5 How it is diagnosed?

Your doctor will first perform a physical examination and once acute pancreatitis is suspected a number of investigations will be undertaken. Blood will be analysed to look for elevated levels of amylase, which is increased in the blood if pancreatic cells have been damaged. An abdominal ultrasound (sonar) will be used to look for gallstones and to also evaluate the pancreas itself, then a CT scan is performed to grade the disease and look for complications. Depending on the circumstances, the doctor can then go on to perform another scan called an MRCP, or they can transfer the patient to theatre and pass a tube with a camera to visualize the involved area.

### 6 What is the treatment?

Treatment depends on the cause, type and grade of pancreatitis one has. It includes supportive therapy to manage immediate complications; antibiotics to treat infections; and surgery if necessary. Sometimes a tube can be placed in the abdomen to drain abnormal fluid. If gallstones are the cause then the gallbladder is generally removed when the patient's condition allows it.

### 7 What are potential complications?

Pancreatitis is a dangerous condition that can lead to severe infection; bowel obstruction; chronic pancreatitis; multi-organ failure, and ultimately death. For these reasons it needs to be diagnosed and treated urgently.