



Wine's effect on the pancreas



Introduction

The pancreas (Figure 1) is the organ that secretes the enzymes that break down and digest foods in the stomach. In addition, it produces insulin and glucagon, which are the hormones that regulate blood sugar levels. The breakdown of the alcohol contained in wine also occurs in the pancreas. Therefore, the pancreas can be exposed to a high concentration of alcohol as well as its primary breakdown product, acetaldehyde, which damage cells and tissues.

Continuous excessive or heavy drinking of wine or other alcoholic beverages can cause pancreatitis. Other conditions such as gallstones (as they pass through the common bile duct) can also cause pancreatitis. Alcoholic pancreatitis is where the pancreas tissues and blood vessels swell (inflammation). The alcohol-damaged cells of the pancreas then leak digestive enzymes into the pancreas

tissue which begins to digest itself. The pancreas cannot function properly.

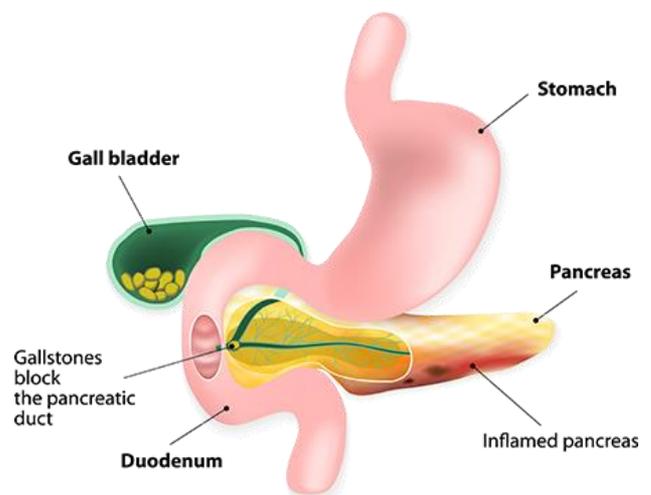


Figure 1. The pancreas and surrounding organs. Signs and symptoms of pancreatitis include pain in the upper abdomen, nausea and vomiting.



If an inflamed pancreas can improve, the pancreatitis is referred to as acute. It improves when an affected person stops drinking alcohol or reduces the amount consumed.

When the damage is recurring, it becomes irreversible, which is referred to as chronic pancreatitis. Chronic pancreatitis can increase the risk of pancreatic cancer and can lead to death.

There is a linear relationship between the amount of wine consumed per day and the risk of developing alcoholic pancreatitis.

Did you know?

Less than 10% of continuous heavy or excessive wine drinkers develop pancreatitis. This suggests that wine consumption alone does not cause alcoholic pancreatitis. Factors such as cigarette smoking, diet, environmental stress and toxins, as well as genetics may contribute to its development.

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References and further reading

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