

# Understanding pancreatic diseases: Chronic pancreatitis and acute pancreatitis.

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## Introduction

The pancreas is a vital organ responsible for the production of digestive enzymes and hormones such as insulin and glucagon. It plays a critical role in regulating glucose metabolism, and dysfunction of the pancreas can result in various diseases, including pancreatitis, pancreatic cancer, and diabetes. Endoscopic evaluation of the pancreas has emerged as an important diagnostic and therapeutic tool in the management of these diseases. In this article, we will discuss the techniques, limitations, and clinical applications of endoscopic evaluation of the pancreas. Endoscopic Ultrasound (EUS) is currently the most widely used technique for endoscopic evaluation of the pancreas. EUS involves the insertion of an endoscope equipped with an ultrasound transducer into the duodenum or stomach, allowing visualization of the pancreas and surrounding structures. EUS can provide high-resolution images of the pancreas and is useful for detecting pancreatic masses, cysts, and ductal abnormalities. It can also be used to obtain Fine-Needle Aspirates (FNA) for cytological and histological analysis [1].

Another technique for endoscopic evaluation of the pancreas is Endoscopic Retrograde Cholangio Pancreatography (ERCP). ERCP involves the insertion of an endoscope into the duodenum and cannulation of the pancreatic and bile ducts. This allows visualization of the pancreatic ductal system and the injection of contrast agents for diagnostic purposes. ERCP can also be used for therapeutic purposes, such as the placement of stents to relieve ductal obstruction. Magnetic Resonance Cholangio Pancreatography (MRCP) is a non-invasive imaging technique that uses Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) to visualize the biliary and pancreatic ductal systems. MRCP can provide detailed images of the pancreas and ductal system without the need for contrast agents or radiation exposure. It is useful for detecting pancreatic ductal abnormalities, such as strictures and dilatations [2].

Endoscopic evaluation of the pancreas is a valuable diagnostic and therapeutic tool, but it is not without limitations. EUS has a limited field of view and is operator-dependent, which can affect the quality of the images obtained. ERCP is an invasive procedure that carries a risk of complications such as pancreatitis, bleeding, and infection. MRCP is a non-invasive imaging technique but has limited availability and is not suitable for patients with metallic implants. Another limitation

of endoscopic evaluation of the pancreas is its limited ability to detect early-stage pancreatic cancer. Pancreatic cancer is often asymptomatic in its early stages, and imaging modalities such as EUS and MRI may not detect small pancreatic lesions. This highlights the importance of regular screening for individuals at high risk of developing pancreatic cancer, such as those with a family history of the disease or certain genetic mutations [3].

Endoscopic evaluation of the pancreas has several clinical applications, including the diagnosis and management of pancreatic diseases such as pancreatitis, pancreatic cysts, and pancreatic cancer. EUS and ERCP can be used to obtain tissue samples for cytological and histological analysis, which can aid in the diagnosis of pancreatic cancer and other pancreatic lesions. EUS can also be used to guide the placement of fiducial markers for Stereotactic Body Radiation Therapy (SBRT) in patients with unresectable pancreatic cancer. ERCP can be used for the placement of stents to relieve ductal obstruction in patients with pancreatic cancer or chronic pancreatitis. This can improve symptoms such as pain and jaundice and may also improve the patient's quality of life. ERCP can also be used for the removal of pancreatic stones in patients with chronic pancreatitis [4].

Images of the pancreas and adjacent structures, allowing for the detection and characterization of pancreatic lesions, such as tumors, cysts, and inflammation. EUS can also be used to obtain tissue samples for analysis, such as Fine-Needle Aspiration (FNA) or biopsy, which can help diagnose pancreatic cancer and other pancreatic disorders. EUS-guided interventions, such as cyst drainage or injection of therapeutic agents, can also be performed. Another technique used for endoscopic evaluation of the pancreas is endoscopic retrograde Cholangio Pancreatography (ERCP). ERCP involves inserting an endoscope into the mouth and down the esophagus, stomach, and duodenum to access the bile and pancreatic ducts. Contrast dye is then injected, and X-rays are taken to visualize the ducts and identify any abnormalities, such as gallstones, strictures, or tumors. ERCP can also be used to obtain tissue samples or to perform therapeutic interventions, such as stent placement to relieve bile or pancreatic duct obstruction. However, both EUS and ERCP have their limitations. EUS has a limited field of view, and some parts of the pancreas may not be easily accessible or visible. ERCP can be technically challenging and carries a risk of complications, such as pancreatitis,

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bleeding, and infection. Additionally, both EUS and ERCP require specialized equipment and expertise, which may not be available in all healthcare settings.

Magnetic resonance Cholangio Pancreatography (MRCP) is a non-invasive imaging technique that uses magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to visualize the pancreatic and biliary ducts. MRCP can provide high-resolution images of the pancreas and detect abnormalities, such as tumors, cysts, and strictures. However, MRCP cannot obtain tissue samples, and the resolution may not be as high as EUS or ERCP. MRCP is also contraindicated in patients with certain medical conditions, such as severe claustrophobia or metallic implants [5].

## Conclusion

Understanding pancreatic diseases, specifically chronic pancreatitis and acute pancreatitis, is essential for timely diagnosis and effective management. Chronic pancreatitis is a progressive condition characterized by prolonged inflammation, leading to irreversible damage to the pancreas and impairment of its functions. On the other hand, acute pancreatitis is a sudden and severe inflammatory condition that can have life-threatening consequences if not promptly treated. Both diseases present distinct clinical features and

require different approaches to treatment. Early recognition and accurate diagnosis of the specific type of pancreatitis are crucial for providing appropriate medical interventions and alleviating symptoms.

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