

Nutrition and Dietetics

Pancreatic enzymes and diet

This information is for patients prescribed pancreatic enzyme replacements as part of their treatment.

The pancreas

The pancreas is a gland near the stomach and duodenum (small intestine). It has many roles in the digestion of food. When food enters the gut, the pancreas releases a juice which contains enzymes. These enzymes break down the carbohydrate, protein and fat in food so your body can absorb them.

When your pancreas cannot produce enough enzymes, your food is not digested and absorbed properly. This is called **malabsorption**. This is why you may have experienced stools that are pale/yellow, offensive smelling, oily and difficult to flush away. Weight loss is also a common side effect.

Other symptoms can include excess wind, belching and flatulence.

How can malabsorption be treated?

The treatment for malabsorption is to replace the missing pancreatic enzymes. You will usually be prescribed capsules, such as Creon, Pancrex, or Nutrizym, which contain a mixture of enzymes:

- Lipase – to help digest fat
- Amylase – to help digest carbohydrate
- Protease - to help digest protein



How and when to take your enzymes

Your doctor, dietitian or specialist nurse will instruct you on how much to take. The quantity may change if your symptoms do not improve on the starting dose.

Everybody is different, and so are your enzyme needs. The amount you need will depend on the size and content of the meal. Main meals will need a larger dose than snacks.

If you are taking the right amount of enzymes, your stools should be a normal colour and consistency.

Recommended dose:

_____ **With main meals**

_____ **With snacks**

Enzymes only work when they mix with food. You should take enzymes **at the start** of meals and snacks. If you are having a large meal or you are a very slow eater, you may need to take half of your enzymes at the start of the meal and the other half in the middle.

The capsules work best when swallowed whole. But if you have difficulty swallowing the capsules, they can be opened. You can mix the granules with yoghurt, jam or apple puree and swallow immediately **without** chewing. If you are opening the capsules, rinse your mouth out with water to make sure there are no granules left in your mouth.

Avoid mixing the granules with very hot food or drinks. Excess heat can stop the enzymes from working.

Patient Information

Foods high in fat

Some foods are particularly high in fat and may need you to take more enzymes. For example:

- Fried foods – battered/breaded fish, chips, breaded chicken
- Fatty meats - burgers, sausages, faggots
- Pastry – pies, tarts, pasties, quiche
- Cheese based meals – cauliflower/macaroni cheese, pizza, lasagne
- Rich puddings and cakes– suet pudding, crumbles, fresh cream cakes, muffins, doughnuts
- Sauces – mayonnaise, Hollandaise sauce, cream sauces
- Chocolate, fudges, toffees

Your dietitian can give you more information about this.

Snacks that do not need you to take enzymes

- Fruit, salads, and vegetables
- Fruit juice, fizzy pop
- Ice lollies, sorbet
- Boiled sweets, rock, mints, candy sweets such as dolly mixtures, chews
- Jelly or jelly sweets such as jelly babies

The levels of fat-soluble vitamins A and D in your blood should be monitored. You may be asked to take a vitamin and mineral supplement to prevent deficiencies.

Should I follow a low-fat diet?

No. It's likely you have already lost weight as you've not been digesting and absorbing your food properly for some time. You may need to choose higher calorie foods, often foods that are high in fat, to help regain weight.

Patient Information

Contact your dietitian if your stools do not return to normal with the pancreatic enzymes. They can help you to adjust your pancreatic enzyme dose accordingly.

If you are already taking medication to help control stomach acid (Omeprazole or Lansoprazole), you must take this as prescribed. This will help the enzymes to work more effectively.

If you have any questions on how to take pancreatic enzymes, please contact:

Dietitian: _____

This leaflet was produced by Coventry Dietitians at University Hospitals Coventry & Warwickshire NHS Trust.

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