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Dietary advice for chronic pancreatitis

Nutrition and Dietetic Service

Information for Patients

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Introduction

Your pancreas is an organ that is part of your digestive system. It sits underneath your stomach and has 2 important jobs:

1. It makes hormones, including insulin and glucagon, which help control your blood sugar levels.
2. It makes digestive enzymes that help your body break down and absorb the food you eat.

How can chronic pancreatitis affect your nutrition?

Chronic pancreatitis causes ongoing damage to your pancreas. This can affect how well your body digests food and can have an impact on your nutrition and weight.

You may have symptoms that make it difficult to eat enough, such as:

- Tummy (stomach) pain,
- Diarrhoea,
- Indigestion,
- Feeling sick (nausea),
- Being sick (vomiting),
- Pale/yellow or orange, greasy, sticky poo,
- Increased wind and bloating,
- Poor appetite,
- Feeling tired,
- Lacking energy,

You may be referred to a **Dietitian** because your chronic pancreatitis may be causing you to lose weight or making it difficult for you to eat enough to meet your body's needs.

Do I need to follow a low-fat diet?

You may have been told to follow a **low-fat diet**. However, there is currently **no evidence that routinely following a low-fat diet helps chronic pancreatitis.**

Fat is an important source of energy for your body. Cutting down on fat for no reason can make it harder to get enough calories, especially if you are already losing weight or struggling to eat enough.

Your Dietitian can help you find the right balance of foods and drinks to make sure you are getting enough **energy, protein, vitamins and minerals**, while also helping you manage your symptoms.

Eating little and often

If you have lost weight, are struggling to regain weight, or have lost your appetite, you will be advised to eat little and often. This involves grazing regularly on small meals and snacks that are high in calories and protein over the course of the day.

- Try to eat 3 small meals and 3 snacks a day. Little and often is best.
- Use a smaller plate as some people find a larger plate of food overwhelms them.
- Keep snacks handy to nibble whenever you can.
- Everyone's appetite changes and you may have good and bad days. Make the most of the good days by eating well and treating yourself to your favourite foods.

Examples of the snacks to have between meals	
Crisps Nuts and seeds Crackers and cheese Hummus or dips and bread sticks or cheese straws Pakoras Spring rolls Fruit and full fat yoghurt, custard or milk jelly Biscuits, cakes, fun sized chocolate bars Trifle Sausage roll Crème caramel Toast with peanut butter	Full fat mousse Scone with butter and jam Bagel with cream cheese Bhajis Spring rolls Croissants Muffins Bombay mix Crisps Scotch egg Malt loaf Full fat rice pudding Halva

Milky drinks and powdered supplements

Powdered drink supplements are available from your chemist or some supermarkets. These can be mixed with fortified milk for extra calories and protein. Examples are Complan® and Meritene®.

Milkshakes

Add your favourite milkshake flavouring, such as milkshake powder or syrup, to a glass of fortified milk. Try adding a scoop of ice cream, creamy yoghurt or spoon of cream for extra calories. Add fresh, tinned or frozen fruit, other flavourings such as honey, cinnamon, sugar or a couple of spoons of fruit juice.

Many supermarkets have a range of ready to drink milkshakes and smoothies that you could buy instead of making your own drinks. Some examples include Yazoo®, Frijj®, Galaxy®, Mars®, or try supermarket own brands.

Fortified milk

Fortified milk can be made using 4 tablespoons (60g) of skimmed dried milk powder such as Marvel® or a supermarket own brand, mixed with 1 pint (568ml) of whole milk (blue top). Mix the dried milk powder with a small amount of milk first to make a paste and then slowly mix in the rest of the milk.

Nutritional supplements

Sometimes even with these measures it may not be possible to gain weight or to keep your weight stable. Your Dietitian, Doctor or specialist Nurse may recommend the use of nutritional supplements.

There are many varieties available to try, including milk-based, juice, powder, yoghurt-style and soups.

You may need to try different products until you find the one you like. The Dietitian will recommend how many you need to take to meet your nutritional needs and if you need to take pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy with the nutritional supplements.

Sample meal plan

Breakfast	• Porridge made with **fortified milk** • Toast with extra butter or margarine, add extra peanut butter, jam or honey • Yogurt with nuts, seeds and dried fruit • Fruit smoothie (made with fruit, **fortified milk**, fruit juice, ice cream or yogurt)
Mid-morning	• Coffee or tea with **fortified milk** • Choice of scone, crumpet or muffin with butter, jam
Lunch	• Jacket potato with cheese and beans • Macaroni cheese made with **fortified milk**, add extra cream • Cream of variety soup, bread and butter Rice pudding or fruit and yogurt for dessert
Mid-afternoon	• Packet of crisps Cheese and crackers • Milkshake made with whole milk Hummus and vegetable sticks
Main meal	• Fish in creamy sauce, mashed potatoes and buttered vegetables • Lentil and chick pea curry with extra cream, with rice Fruit crumble with full fat custard
Supper	• Toast with pate, cheese or beans • Biscuits with a milky drink using fortified milk Bowl of cereal with **fortified milk**

How does your pancreas help with digestion?

Your pancreas helps your body **digest and absorb** the food you eat. It makes **digestive enzymes** which break down food into smaller parts so that your small intestine can absorb the nutrients and your body can use them.

Your pancreas makes 3 main digestive enzymes:

- **Protease:** breaks down protein
- **Amylase**: breaks down carbohydrates
- **Lipase**: breaks down fat

What happens if you do not make enough enzymes?

If your pancreas does not make enough digestive enzymes, your body may not be able to digest and absorb food properly. This is called pancreatic exocrine insufficiency (PEI).

You may notice some of the following symptoms:

- Pale, orange or yellow poo (stools),
- Poo that is particularly smelly,
- Loose poo (diarrhoea) or needing to open your bowels urgently,
- Oily or greasy poo that is difficult to flush away,
- Bloating,
- Wind or tummy cramps,
- Indigestion,

If you have any of these symptoms, please speak to your healthcare professional. You may need **pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy (PERT)**. PERT provides the digestive enzymes your body needs to help you digest and absorb food properly.

Pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy (PERT)

If the pancreas is not making enough enzymes to help break down the food you eat, the food will pass through your digestive system without being broken down and absorbed. This is called **malabsorption**. We treat malabsorption by giving you the enzymes that your body is not making enough of. You will be prescribed 1 of the following medications to help you digest and absorb the nutrition from your food:

- Creon®
- Nutrizym®
- Pancrex®

Most come as capsules, but some also come as a powder or as granules. All of the medications contain a mixture of the 3 pancreatic enzymes **amylase, protease and lipase**.

The enzyme replacement therapy comes in different strengths, for example Creon 25,000. The number shows the amount of lipase in each capsule.

These enzymes are made from pork products. Please talk with your Doctor or Dietitian if you are allergic to pork or have concerns because of your religious beliefs. There is currently no alternative.

For more information on how and when to take your enzyme medication visit https://yourhealth.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk/ and search for: ‘Advice about taking pancreatic enzyme replacement capsules’ or leaflet 603.

Constipation

Constipation is common in people with chronic pancreatitis, especially if on strong pain killers such as morphine based pain killers or codeine. Although there are dietary measures that may help, usually you will need laxatives from the GP to help you poo (open your bowels) in the short term. **It is not recommended to reduce your pancreatic enzyme replacement capsules to manage constipation.**

It is recommended that all adults drink 6 to 8 glass of fluid each day. This can be water, tea, coffee, unsweetened fruit juice, squash and milk.

Eating a high fibre diet may also help with overall gut health. Tips to help you to do this are:

- Have a high-fibre cereal at breakfast like Weetabix, shredded wheat or porridge.
- Add fruit or linseeds to your breakfast cereal.
- Have a wholemeal sandwich at lunch.
- Have wholemeal pasta with vegetables at dinner time.
- Add pulses such as baked beans and lentils to dishes.
- Add extra vegetables to sauces such as bolognaise, curry and chilli.

Nausea and vomiting

You may feel nauseous or start to vomit if you are having a flare up of your chronic pancreatitis. It is really important that you tell your GP or surgical team as they can prescribe anti-sickness medications to help. Some dietary measures may also help:

- Eat small and frequent meals throughout the day. Graze on high calorie or high protein snacks
- Sip on nutritious liquids between meals, for example milk, fruit juice, nutritional supplements
- Give your body time to digest the food, eat food slowly and sit upright after eating
- You may find cold foods easier to eat as the smell of cooking food may put you off. If you are cooking, try to cook in a well ventilated room, or ask someone else to cook where possible.
- Ginger may help; ginger ale, ginger nut biscuits, ginger tea or crystallised ginger.
- Neutral flavours such as plain or salty foods might be better.

If you have Type 3C diabetes

This is a type of Diabetes that is different to the more common Type 1 and 2 Diabetes. It is caused by having part or all of the pancreas removed (surgically) or the pancreas being damaged (such as in pancreatitis). You may need to give yourself insulin injections to keep your blood glucose levels within normal levels.

Individual recommendations for diet will depend on your nutrition and how you are eating and drinking at that time. The aim is to eat a diet that you enjoy, and that keeps your weight stable and blood glucose levels in an acceptable range. The most important advice with diabetes is to **eat regularly**. You should try to avoid **skipping meals**. You should not try to control your blood glucose levels by not eating.

If you have lost weight or are underweight then you should aim to have a high calorie and high protein diet. If your blood glucose levels are high then you should talk about adjusting your insulin dose with your Diabetes team. **You should not reduce the amount of food you eat to try to control blood glucose levels**. Your Dietitian will give you more specific advice on how to get the nutrients you need.

Vitamins and minerals

People with chronic pancreatitis taking pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy may need to take more vitamin and mineral supplements. This is to stop long term deficiencies such as weak bones (osteoporosis).

During the chronic pancreatitis clinic you will have a blood test to check if you have low levels of certain vitamin and minerals and we will tell you if you do.

If you have any questions please contact your Dietitian on **0116 258 5400**.

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Visit www.uhleicester.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals.
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

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