

Pancreatic Enzyme Deficiency

You have a condition called pancreatic enzyme deficiency. Because of this condition, you will need to take a medicine that will help your body get what it needs from food. This will help you to manage side effects, gain or keep on weight, and feel better. This factsheet gives you information about this condition and what you can do to manage it.

What are pancreatic enzymes?

Your pancreas makes substances called enzymes that help you break down and absorb food. There are three main types of enzymes. Each type of enzyme (lipase, protease, and amylase) helps break down fats, proteins, or carbohydrates.

What is pancreatic enzyme deficiency?

With pancreatic enzyme deficiency, your pancreas can't make enough enzymes you need. This is often because of a medical problem or treatment for medical problems. Often, pancreatic cancer, biliary duct blockage, or Whipple procedures treatments for it can cause this to happen.

What symptoms are there?

Common symptoms include:

- Constant indigestion
- Cramping after meals
- Large amounts of gas or gas with an unusual odor.
- Weight loss
- Frequent stools or diarrhea
- Unique stool or gas. Stools that have a light, yellow, or orange color. Greasy stool or stool with an unusual odor.

You may not have all of these symptoms.

What do I need to do?

There are two parts to treatment. First, you will take a medicine that gives you pancreatic enzymes. Second, you need to eat in a way to help the medicine work most effectively.

Medicine

Your doctor will prescribe a medicine that contains the right amount and type of enzymes for you. You might

find supplements at your store or pharmacy with the same name or ingredients. Supplements such as these don't have enough enzymes in them to help the type of deficiency you have.

Follow the instructions provided by your pharmacist to take the medicine. But here are some tips:

- Take your capsules with every meal and every snack.
- Take half of your prescribed dose before starting your meal and the other half during the meal. Do not skip either half.
- Swallow the capsules immediately. Do not chew or hold in your mouth.
- You may open the capsules and pour the medicine into some soft foods. Swallow the food immediately. Do not mix capsules with dairy products such as milk, ice cream, yogurt, or cottage cheese.

Like many medicines, pancreatic enzymes can be expensive. Often, health insurance will cover most of the cost. If you have trouble paying for these medicines, speak with a member of your treatment team. Your treatment team may be able to help you access some financial support programs to help you with those costs.

Diet

The enzymes work best when you eat frequently and limit fats or fiber in your food.

- Eat small meals every 2-3 hours.
- Limit the amount of high-fiber foods.
- Look for low-fat foods with high amounts of calories.

It can be helpful for you or your caregiver to meet with a registered dietitian. Talk with a member of your treatment team about a referral to a registered dietitian. You can also meet with a dietitian in the Wellness and Integrative Health Center at Huntsman Cancer Institute. Call 801-587-4585 or visit the center on the first floor of the cancer hospital.

Why is it important for me to do this?

Simply put, it can help you feel better. The treatment can help your body absorb the nutrients it needs for you to heal and go through your regular activities. It can also help prevent and manage diarrhea. By doing so, it can help you prevent weight loss that can impact your health or complicate other treatments.

Where can I go with questions?

Contact your treatment team at 801 585 2050.

You can also visit the Cancer Learning Center for more information. There are cookbooks that may help you with ideas of foods that can make the treatment more effective. Call 1-888-424-2100, email cancerinfo@hci.utah.edu, or visit the library on the 6th floor of the cancer hospital.