



National PANCREATIC CANCER *Canada* Foundation

Diet and Nutrition

People with pancreatic cancer have many nutritional challenges to overcome. There is the lack of appetite and nausea that often accompanies cancer, compounded by the possibility that the pancreas is no longer functioning well enough to digest food properly. If you have pancreatic cancer, you may be prescribed supplemental pancreatic enzymes. You should also follow a diet that optimizes your nutrition.

You must consume a diet that contains a wide variety of nutrients so you can maintain your weight and have energy to be active. Your diet should be rich in protein and calories. You should also drink eight glasses of fluid each day to combat dehydration and improve appetite. Try to eat five to six small meals each day. Avoid consuming the empty or unhealthy calories found in sweets and junk food. Eat fish and lean meat. Eat red meat sparingly. Milk products are a good source of protein also. Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables as long as they do not trigger diarrhea.

To keep the food down, be sure the diet is very soft. The food should be easy to digest and free from a lot of acid. Please keep in mind that you should consult with your doctor about the patient's diet. Some good food choices are listed below. Try to understand that much trial and error will go into your loved one's diet. Sometimes certain foods bother a patient and not others.

SUGGESTED FOODS TO TRY: Soups, pasta (wellcooked), yogurt, rice, cream of wheat, cream of rice, oatmeal, mashed potatoes, yams, poached eggs, pudding, Jello, ice cream, peanut butter, frozen yogurt, toast, applesauce . Another food that many people seem to overlook is baby food. The deserts and cereals are tasty and made to be gentle on the tummy. These are great for a change of pace. In some cases, the patient even prefers these easy to digest foods.

SUGGESTED FOODS TO AVOID: Avoid citrus fruits and juices like oranges and grapefruit. The increased stomach acid will cause nausea, heartburn, and acid indigestion. Hard to digest vegetables that can cause gas should also be avoided. Some of these include tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, green peppers, cauliflower, broccoli, peas, and any other vegetables that bother the patient.

Greasy foods like hamburgers and fries should not be in the pancreas cancer patient's diet. Seeds and nuts should also be avoided. All of these foods can cause much stomach pain and discomfort.

Keep in mind that every person is different. Everyone has different likes and dislikes. This must also be taken into consideration. Many times the patient knows best. If he or she tells you that something makes them sick, listen! Be sure that the patient eats as much as they can of whatever foods that they can tolerate and enjoy.

Weight loss is a common problem because having cancer changes your metabolism and this means you need to eat more calories than you usually eat. You may not feel like eating more because the side effects of pancreatic cancer treatment can make it difficult to eat or drink enough nutrients or fluids. It is possible you may feel full after only a few bites and perhaps food will taste different. Symptoms of pancreatic cancer such as, constipation, gas or nausea makes it difficult to eat.

Being in pain, enduring stress and feeling tired all affect your diet. Pancreatic insufficiency may be present after pancreatic surgery. This means the pancreas is not secreting enough of the digestive enzymes to digest food properly. This can cause diarrhea and a further weight loss. If you take an enzyme supplement before meals, it will help to stop these symptoms.

Drink plenty of fluids between meals but limit the amount when eating foods so you don't fill up on liquid. Caffeinated drinks cause dehydration so avoid these. If nausea is a problem, avoid eating meals with strong odors, high fat greasy fried and spicy foods. Eating dry crackers will help when feeling nauseated.

A hospital dietitian can assess your needs and design a diet plan that best meets your needs, including supplementary insulin or pancreatic enzymes as needed. They also can help you alter the consistency, fiber content or fat content of foods to keep food palatable and prevent you from becoming malnourished.

* A **Recommended Cookbook** is "Goes Down Easy" by Elise Mecklinger with the Princess Margaret Hospital Dietitians. It provides recipes to help you cope with the challenge of eating during cancer treatment. There are sections dedicated to dealing with diarrhea, nausea and loss of appetite.

* Please note: This information is not intended to be substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. If you are ill, or suspect that you are ill, see a doctor immediately