

GASTROENTEROLOGY

Department of the
CIUSSS de l'Estrie – CHUS



Chronic Pancreatitis:

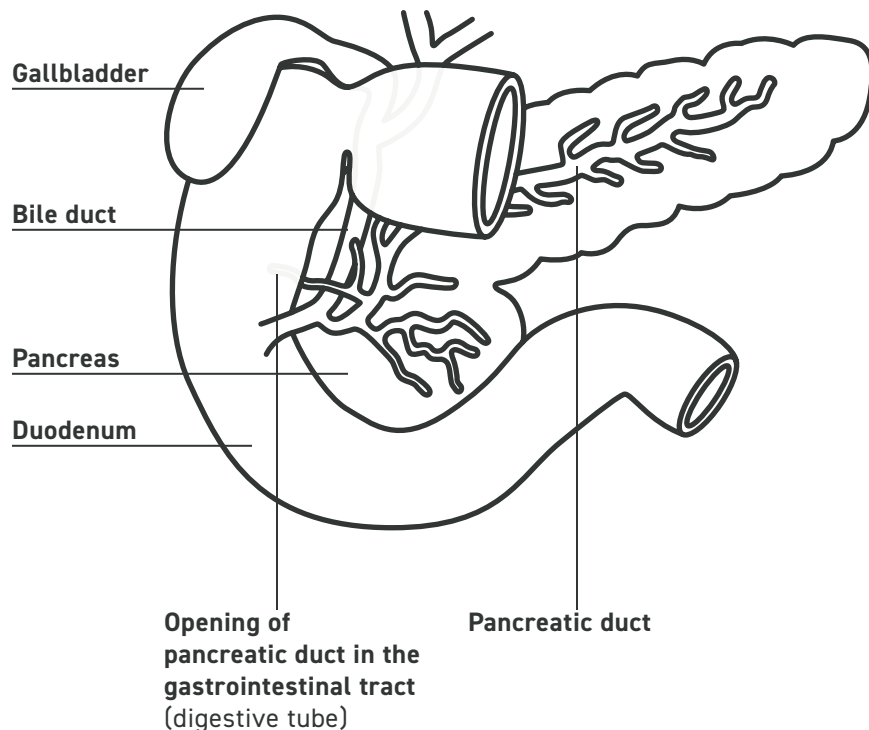
Treatment and Advice

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE PANCREAS?

The pancreas is an organ in the digestive system that is essential for regulating blood-sugar levels (glycemia) as well as for digesting certain foods.

The pancreas secretes insulin and glucagon in response to changes in blood-sugar levels. It helps to prevent both drops in blood-sugar levels (hypoglycemia) and rises in blood-sugar levels (hyperglycemia).

In addition, the pancreas secretes enzymes into the small intestine (small bowel) in response to food intake. Those enzymes help to break down food and to improve its digestion and absorption.



WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF CHRONIC PANCREATITIS?

Chronic pancreatitis can lead to pancreatic insufficiency, whereby the pancreas is unable to function properly. There are various degrees of pancreatic insufficiency, each having its own nutritional recommendations.

Chronic pancreatitis has many symptoms and consequences which vary by degree of impairment and cause:

- Abdominal pain
- Denutrition leading to weight loss
- Malabsorption of fat resulting in oily, greasy stools known as steatorrhea.
- Malabsorption of carbohydrates and proteins, leading to:
 - Gas
 - Weight loss
 - Abdominal distension (bloating)
- Diabetes

HOW IS CHRONIC PANCREATITIS TREATED?

There is no specific treatment for chronic pancreatitis, but its management helps to treat complications and to reduce symptoms. Considering that each person is different and requires personalized case management, we will only address nutritional advice in this article. For diabetes and pain management, speak to your physician.

Nutritional management helps to fill your body's needs and to prevent malnutrition. Nutrition is an essential part of your treatment. In fact, many people who suffer from chronic pancreatitis develop severe deficiencies due to a lack of pancreatic enzymes that enable food to be digested. Preventing malnutrition will help you to maintain quality of life.

Nutritional advice

Always speak to your physician and nutritionist about nutritional recommendations.

For those with chronic pancreatitis, the following three elements play a cardinal role on a nutritional level:

- Correcting nutritional deficiencies
- Maintaining an adequate diet
- Taking pancreatic enzyme supplements

Taking pancreatic enzyme supplements

The pancreas secretes enzymes that enable the absorption and digestion of food. The pancreas of a person with chronic pancreatitis no longer secretes enough enzymes. Enzyme supplements help to improve the digestion of food and to reduce abdominal pain and diarrhea. Your physician will prescribe a dose based on your weight.

It is recommended to take your pancreatic enzymes with your meals. Taking pancreatic enzymes well before meals is usually unnecessary.

Correcting nutritional deficiencies

Your physician will also regularly monitor the vitamins and minerals in your blood. In fact, those with pancreatic insufficiency have a greater risk of having a deficiency, for example, of vitamins A, D, E and K, of calcium, of zinc, of folate, and so on. Your physician or nutritionist will recommend supplements sold in pharmacies. Never take any vitamin or mineral supplements before first consulting your physician.



Maintaining an adequate diet

Those with chronic pancreatitis have greater energy requirements than those in good health. It is necessary to eat sufficient food to meet the body's basic requirements.

- Eat foods that are high in calories.
- Eat several small meals throughout the day (6 to 8).
- If you are taking pancreatic enzymes, avoid ingesting large amounts of fibre (e.g., high fibre fruits and vegetables, whole-wheat cereal, bran). Fibres can impair pancreatic enzyme function in the intestine.
- If you have advanced pancreatic insufficiency, your physician and your nutritionist may recommend increasing your consumption of complex carbohydrates: cereal, bread, dried vegetables, pasta, and certain fruits (e.g., bananas); as well as ensuring an adequate protein intake. You must therefore eat meat, fish, eggs, and dairy products. Yet you must avoid fried foods.
- Avoid eating products rich in simple sugars/monosaccharides (powdered sugar, candy, soft drinks, fruit, pastries).
- You must absolutely avoid alcohol.
- It is not recommended that you eliminate fats from your diet. Certain types of fat are important for the proper functioning of the body. However, if you have diabetes, it is recommended that you ingest moderate amounts of fat. Speak to your physician or to your nutritionist
- You may be advised to take certain types of fat, such as oils containing medium-chain fats (medium-chain triglycerides).
 - These oils must be prescribed by your physician and are available in pharmacies.
 - They might cause discomfort if taken in large quantities.
 - Exercise caution if you are diabetic: moderate the amounts you take.
 - If they are recommended to you:
 - Start with 5 ml three times daily.
 - Add them to a fat-free beverage (e.g., fruit juice, coffee).
 - Add them to salad dressings, hot cereal, mashed potatoes, soups, salads, pasta, applesauce, other fruit, etc.

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