

Pancreatic cancer, diet and you

Jeni Jones, Nicci Murphy & Sarah Jeffrey

20th May 2025

What we'll be talking about

- What does the pancreas do?
- What diet and digestive symptoms can people with pancreatic cancer experience?
- What is pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy (PERT), and why is it important?
- What foods should I eat or avoid eating?
- What is a dietitian, and should I be seen by one?
- Answering your questions and where you can find further support

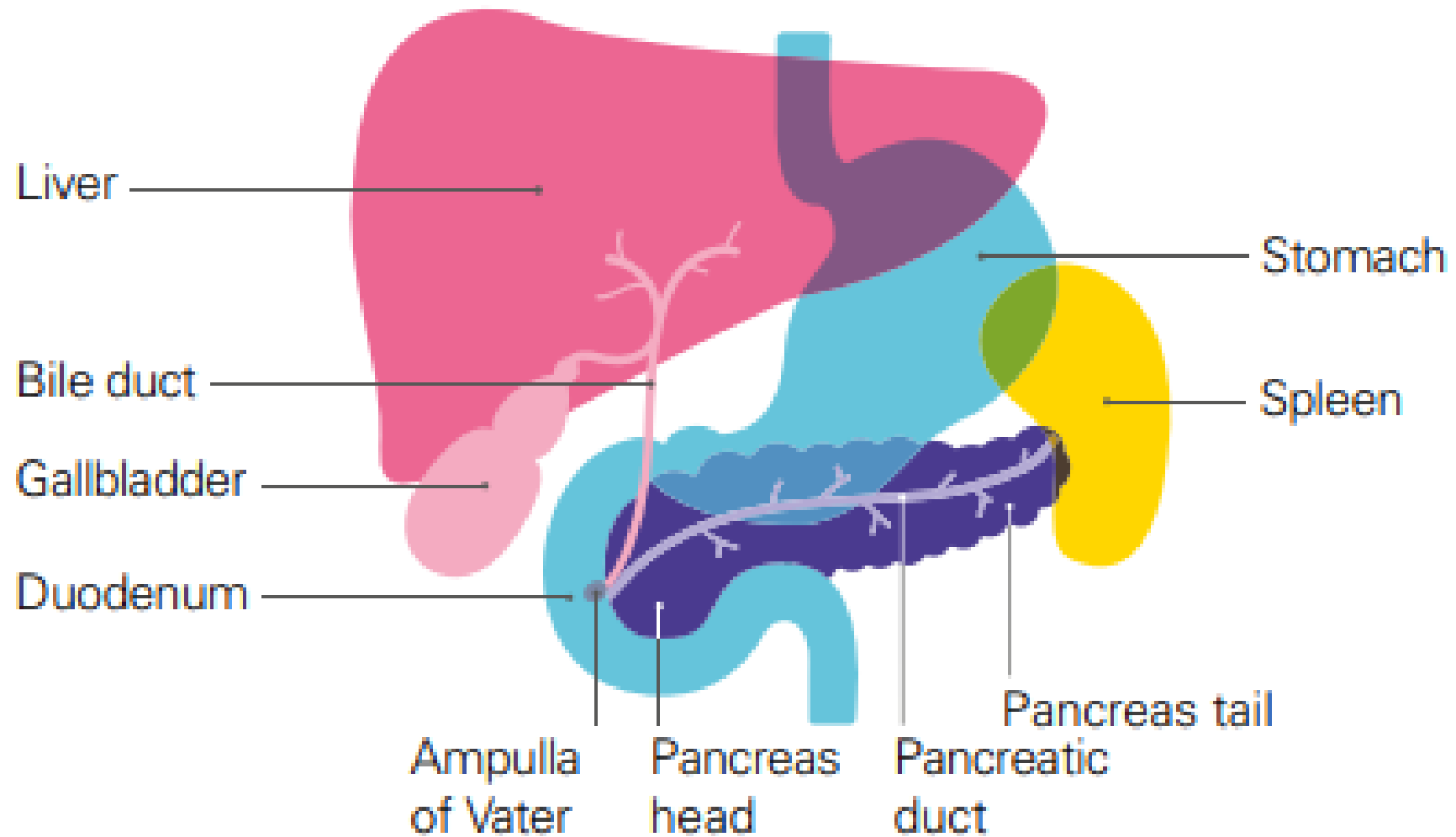
Our speakers

Jeni Jones and Nicci Murphy
Nurse Specialists at Pancreatic Cancer UK

Sarah Jeffrey, HPB Dietitian, Manchester Royal Infirmary

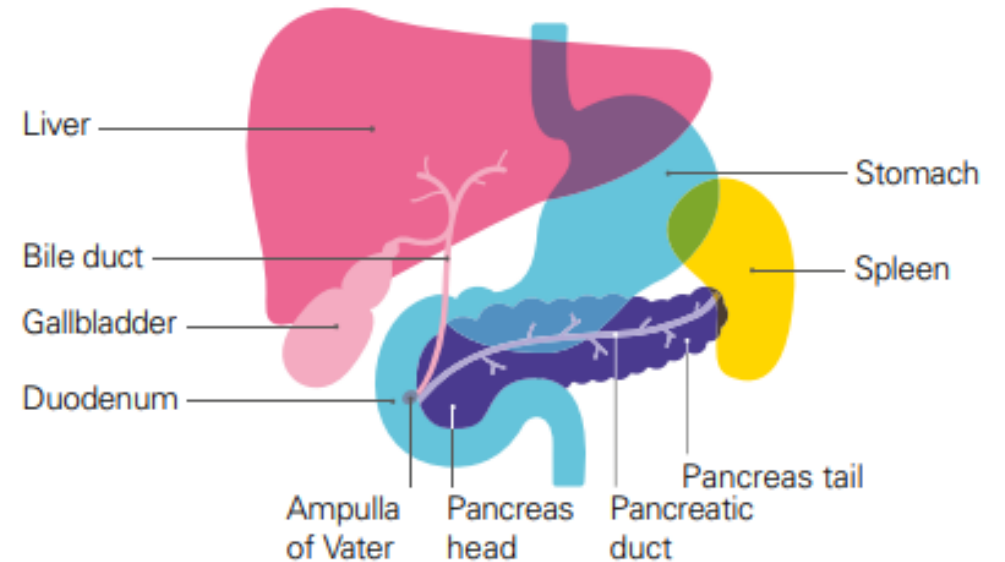
What does the pancreas do?

The pancreas and surrounding organs



The pancreas – what does it do?

- The pancreas has two jobs: blood sugar control (endocrine) and producing digestive enzymes (exocrine)
- Digestive enzymes are released when you eat and help break down your food
- When you have cancer, the pancreas doesn't work properly any more and doesn't produce these digestive enzymes – this is called PEI or pancreatic exocrine insufficiency



**What digestive symptoms
can people with pancreatic
cancer experience?**

What digestive symptoms can people with pancreatic cancer experience?

- Feeling sick or being sick
- Pale / greasy poo
- Tummy pain
- Bloating
- Reflux or heartburn
- Increased wind (burping or farting)
- Diarrhoea
- Increased tiredness
- Weight loss
- Low blood sugars



**Which of the following symptoms
have you or your loved one
experienced?**

What is pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy (PERT), and why is it important?

PERT – what is it?

- Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement Therapy
- A medication to replace a job of the pancreas to help break down food
- Different brands are available in the UK
 - Creon (10,000 unit and 25,000 unit capsules)
 - Nutrizym (22,000 unit capsules)
 - Pancrex V (powder)
 - Other brands are available due to current shortages



Are you taking pancreatic enzyme replacement therapy?

PERT – who needs it?

- Anyone diagnosed with pancreatic cancer
- Most people who have had surgery to their pancreas
- Anyone with significant pancreas damage



How confident do you feel about your understanding of how to take PERT e.g. Creon?

PERT – how do I take it?

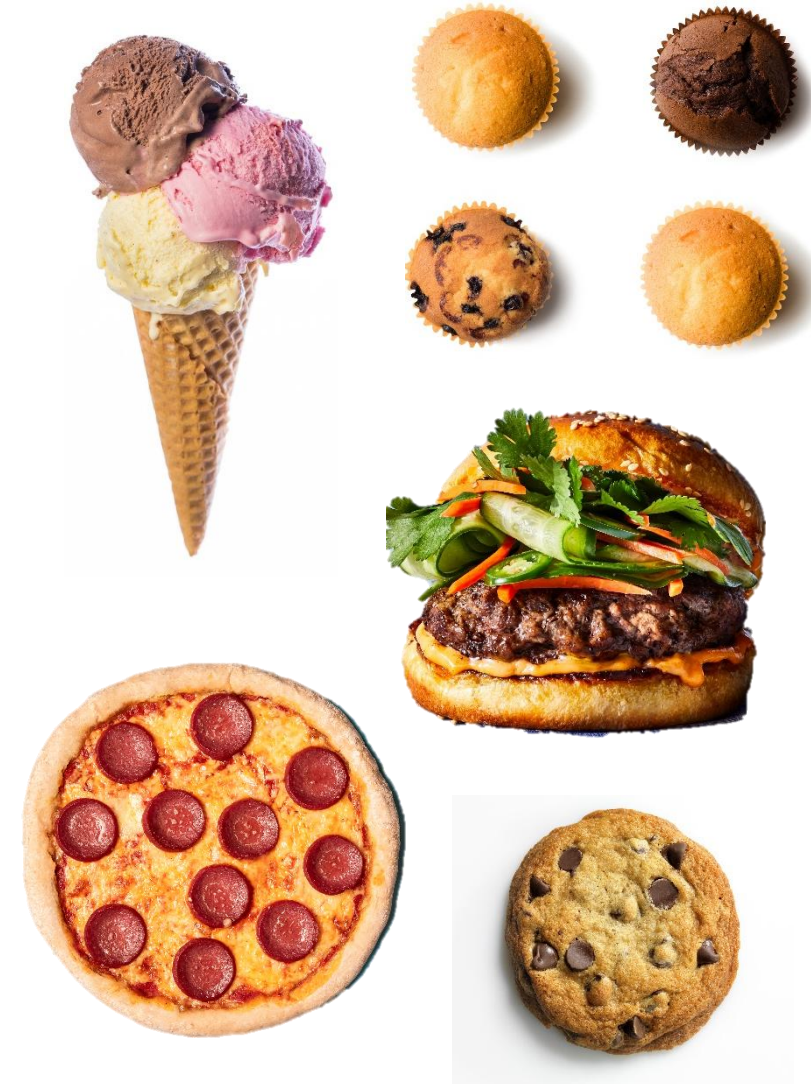
- Starting amount:
 - Creon 25,000 capsules or nutrizym 22,000
 - 3 capsules with meals
 - 2 capsules with snacks, puddings, nourishing drinks (milky drinks like cappuccinos or milkshakes)
- Take capsules with a cold drink
- Spread it out
 - For example, at meals have one capsule at the start, one in the middle and one towards the end



What foods should I eat or avoid eating?

What foods should I eat?

- Focus on high energy and high protein foods such as cream cakes, biscuits, milky foods (yoghurts, ice cream, cheese), pork pies, sausage rolls, hummus, samosas, mixed nuts
- If you are struggling with your appetite, you may be prescribed supplements such as Fortisip or Ensures to help keep your weight and strength. You will need to take PERT to digest these.
- If you have been diagnosed with diabetes this advice might differ, always check with your medical team



What foods should I avoid?

The short answer.... Nothing!

There is no evidence to suggest avoiding certain foods makes symptoms better.

The long answer... focus on things to add in rather than take away

Lots of foods are turned into sugars, for example all fruit and vegetables get turned into sugar so they can help fuel your body!

Sugars and fats are really important parts of the diet to help keep your weight and strength up

Myth

Sugar is cancer causing or makes cancer worse

Fact

Sugar is the energy source for all cells in the body, unfortunately this means cancer cells as well.

Do I need to be seen by a dietitian?

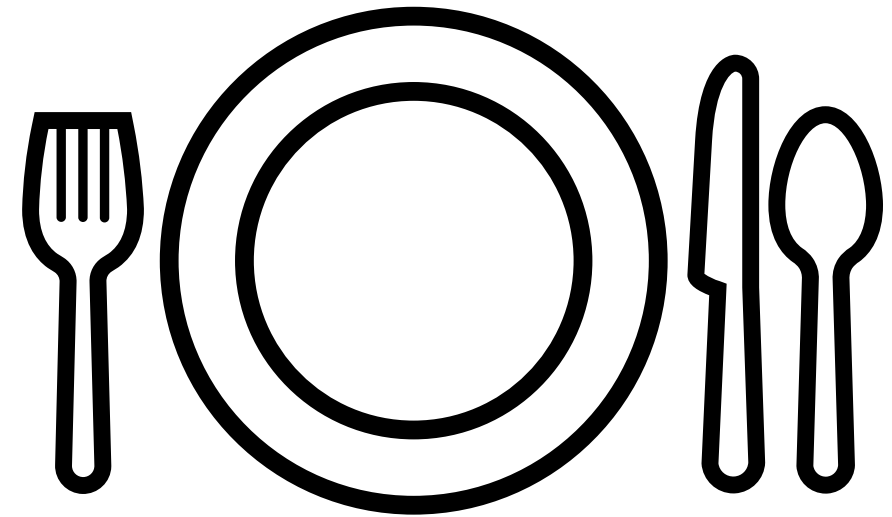
Do I need to be seen by a dietitian?

What is a dietitian?

- We use evidenced based guidelines to support people with food and nutrition through their health conditions.
- We are a regulated body of health care professionals, just like physiotherapists or nurses

What would a dietitian be able to support me with?

- If you have lost lots of weight or strength
- If you have newly started on PERT
- If you have symptoms despite being on PERT



Top 5 takeaways

- 1) The pancreas has two jobs: blood sugar control and producing digestive enzymes. When you have pancreatic cancer one or both of these functions might not work properly
- 2) There is a wide range of symptoms of your body not breaking food down properly
- 3) These symptoms can be managed by taking PERT, also called creon or nutrizym, with food and nourishing drinks
- 4) You do not need to avoid any foods in particular. Focusing on high protein, high energy foods will help maintain your weight and strength
- 5) A dietitian can help you find solutions for weight loss, strength loss and ongoing digestive symptoms. Do not be afraid to ask if you are struggling!

Who can you contact for support?

Pancreatic Cancer UK

Specialist Nurse Support Line
Monday – Friday, 9am-4pm
(10am-4pm on Wednesdays)

Call 0808 801 0707 or email
nurse@pancreaticcancer.org.uk

www.pancreaticcancer.org.uk

Join a peer support Circle to connect
with others who 'just get it'
[https://www.pancreaticcancer.org.uk/s
upport-for-you/circles/](https://www.pancreaticcancer.org.uk/support-for-you/circles/)



Over to you...

...What questions do you have for us?