

Pancreatic cancer and diet: key terms to know

**Please be aware, terms highlighted in purple, are also defined within this document.*

Absorption

Once your food has been broken down through **digestion**, nutrients from the food pass into the blood. This process is called **absorption**.

Anti-emetics

Medications that prevent or reduce nausea and vomiting, supporting better **nutrition** and consumption of food.

Bile Acid Malabsorption (BAM)

Difficulty absorbing bile acids, which can worsen diarrhoea; may occur with pancreatic cancer or after surgery.

Cachexia

Cancer-related severe weight and muscle loss caused by poor **nutrient** absorption and changes in how the body processes nutrients.

Digestion

Digestion is what your body does to break down your food so that you can use the nutrients from it.

Diet Fortification or Enrichment

Adding extra calories or protein to foods (e.g., adding butter, cheese, cream, nut butters) to increase nutritional value without increasing food volume.

Early Satiety

Feeling full very quickly after beginning to eat, which can contribute to poor nutrition and weight loss.

Glycaemic Control

Managing blood sugar levels – important because pancreatic cancer and surgery can damage insulin production, leading to diabetes.

Hydration

Adequate fluid consumption to prevent dehydration, which is particularly important when experiencing diarrhoea or poor appetite.

Malabsorption

When the body cannot properly absorb **nutrients** from food, often due to reduced pancreatic enzyme activity. It can lead to weight loss, diarrhoea, oily stools, and nutrient deficiencies.

Nutrients and Nutrition

Your body needs **nutrients**, which you get from your food. They include protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals. **Nutrition** means the food and drink you have and how it affects your health.

Oral Nutritional Supplements (ONS)

High-calorie, high-protein drinks or powders used to increase **nutrition** when meals alone are not enough.

Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement Therapy (PERT)

These are prescription enzymes in capsule form taken with meals and snacks to help digest fats, proteins, and carbohydrates. These enzymes support better **digestion** and prevent symptoms of **malabsorption**.

Pancreatic Exocrine Insufficiency (PEI)

This occurs when the pancreas does not make enough digestive enzymes to properly break down food. This means the body cannot absorb **nutrients**, which can lead to symptoms like weight loss, diarrhoea, bloating, and feeling tired.

Small, Frequent Meals

Eating little and often – 6–8 smaller meals per day – to improve the amount of **nutrients** consumed and reduce treatment-related discomfort such as nausea or fullness.

Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth (SIBO)

Excess bacteria in the small intestine leading to bloating, diarrhoea, and discomfort due to altered **digestion**.

Steatorrhea

Fatty, oily, pale, and foul-smelling stools caused by fat not being properly digested. A common sign of **malabsorption** in pancreatic cancer.

Taste Changes

Changes in how food tastes, often caused by chemotherapy or the cancer itself, leading to reduced appetite.