



Pancreatic Enzymes

What are pancreatic enzymes?

Pancreatic enzymes are made by your body to help you digest and absorb nutrients from your food. These enzymes are made by an organ in your body called the pancreas and then travel to your duodenum (first part of your small intestine). In your duodenum, these enzymes help with digestion by breaking down fats, proteins, and carbohydrates (sugars).

If needed, pancreatic enzymes are available as a medicine prescribed by your health care provider. Common names of pancreatic enzymes include Creon (Lipase-protease-amylase) or Pancrelipase. When taken properly, pancreatic enzymes can help prevent weight loss and absorb needed nutrients from your food. It can also help control discomfort that can happen if you have pancreatic enzyme insufficiency.

Why would someone need to take pancreatic enzymes?

You may need to take pancreatic enzymes if:

- You have a pancreas that is not working correctly
- You have had surgeries that lower your body's ability to make or deliver pancreatic enzymes
- You have had diseases or illnesses, such as pancreatitis (inflammation or swelling of your pancreas)
- You have a blockage that keeps the pancreas from releasing enzymes (can be caused by surgeries or tumors)

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

What are some symptoms that could be helped from the use of pancreatic enzymes?

Pancreatic enzymes may help those who have:

- Weight loss or inability to gain weight
- Indigestion (upset stomach), increased gas, bloating, cramping or pain after meals (especially meals that are high in fat such as red meat, full fat dairy, pastries, and some desserts)
- Stools that are frequent, large, oily, floating or light in color (yellow, tan, clay, white). These stools and gas may have a very bad smell.

How do I take pancreatic enzymes?

Pancreatic enzymes are taken by mouth and will be prescribed by your medical provider. They may start with the smallest dose of pancreatic enzymes and increase the amount you are to take, if needed, based on your symptoms. It is important to take your pancreatic enzymes according to the directions every time.

- Take pancreatic enzymes with every meal, snack or beverage that contains fat. This includes taking with high-calorie, high-protein nutritional drinks.
- Take your first capsule of pancreatic enzymes with your first bite of this type of food or drink. If you are to take more than one capsule, take half of the ordered capsules at the beginning of your meal and half in the middle of your meal. It is important that pancreatic enzymes travel through your digestive system with your food as you eat. The enzymes will not work as well if you take them at the end of a meal.
- Swallow whole pancreatic enzyme capsules with other fluids you are drinking at mealtimes. Do not crush or chew these capsules unless directed by your medical provider.
- You do not need to take pancreatic enzymes with fat-free foods or drinks.

How long will I have to take pancreatic enzymes?

The length of treatment with pancreatic enzymes is different for each person. Follow the instructions given to you by your medical provider.

When should I call my health care provider?

Call your health care provider if:

- Your symptoms continue or become worse
- You have concerns about not being able to pay for this medicine
- You do not know how to read labels to see the fat, protein, or calorie content of certain foods or drinks. Ask to speak to a registered dietitian to learn more, if needed.