



Question:

Is there a specialized diet recommended for people who have had the Whipple procedure for pancreatic cancer?

Answer:

A pancreaticoduodenectomy (PD) or Whipple is a demanding procedure. It involves the surgical removal of part of the small intestine, pancreas and sometimes part of the stomach. As a result, patients who have had this procedure may need to make some dietary changes following surgery. These dietary changes, along with the need to use pancreatic enzymes with meals and snacks, may be temporary or lifelong. The Whipple procedure can alter the digestion of important nutrients and may change the rate that food passes through the digestive system.

Each surgery is different because each patient's disease status (e.g. location of the tumor, size of tumor) is different. Therefore, each patient will have different nutritional needs. A Registered Dietitian (RD) can assist with this by monitoring the patient's post-operative medical status, laboratory values, and reported symptoms to help create an appropriate diet for the patient.

General diet recommendations after this surgery include:

- Eat 5-6 small, frequent meals during the day to ensure adequate nutrition
- Choose foods high in protein and calories to help promote healing and maintain weight
- Avoid large amounts of fluid with meals, as this may affect how much food you can eat. Small sips with meals are okay.
- You may have issues such as gas/bloating or diarrhea, pancreatic enzymes may be needed to metabolize your food, generally having a low fat diet does not solve the issues since after surgery it is difficult to eat enough and maintain weight. With the removal of part of the pancreas, pancreatic

enzymes may be needed to help with the absorption of fat, carbohydrate, and protein.

After fully recovering from surgery, patients may be able to slowly add back foods that they have been avoiding. These foods should be tried one at a time to determine if they are tolerated well. Many patients are eventually able to eat regular sized meals.

Talk to your medical provider regarding assistance with pancreatic enzymes. The dosing of these enzymes may change as you begin to eat more, so keep you medical team informed about your intake and any digestive issues that may continue. These enzymes need to be titrated depending on amount and frequency of intake. An RD at your medical center will be able to help with the appropriate dosing.

Ask to visit with an RD to help with managing any diet restrictions. Appropriate diet management can help you to feel better.

The original question and answer were generously donated by Diana Dyer, MS, RD, a cancer survivor, Registered Dietitian, organic garlic farmer, and the author of "A Dietitian's Cancer Story: Information & Inspiration for Recovery & Healing from a 3-time Cancer Survivor."

Question and Answer updated by Jyoti Benjamin, MS, RD, CSO, CD on behalf of the ON DPG

References, Websites, and Resources:

1. cancer.org
2. PANCAN.org
3. MDAnderson.org