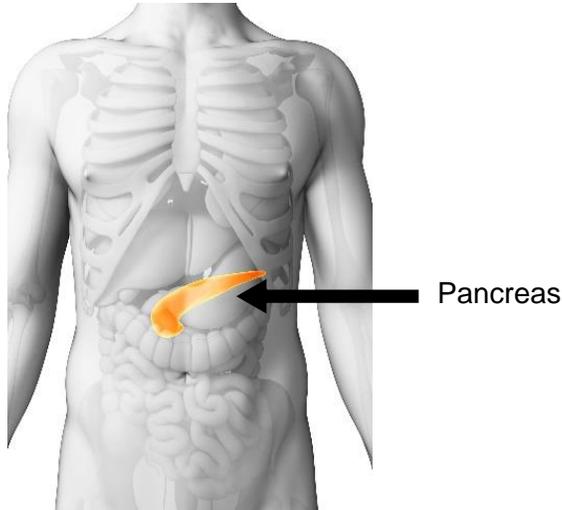


# Pancreatic Enzymes

## What are pancreatic enzymes?

Your pancreas makes pancreatic enzymes to digest (break down) food. These enzymes help to digest and absorb fat, protein, and carbohydrates.

A healthy pancreas can make these enzymes each time you eat.



If you don't have enough pancreatic enzymes, you may have:

- bloating, gas, stomach cramps, or gurgling noises especially after eating
- burping (more than usual)
- diarrhea
- foul smelling gas or poop (worse than usual)
- heartburn
- light-coloured, yellowish, greasy, fatty, or floating poop
- weight loss without trying



Your doctor may prescribe pancreatic enzyme pills if your body doesn't make enough.

## Why do I need to take them?

You may need to take pancreatic enzymes if you have:

- blocked or narrowed pancreatic or biliary ducts
- cancer of the pancreas
- cystic fibrosis
- chronic (ongoing or recurring) pancreatitis
- damage to your pancreas

You may also need to take pancreatic enzymes if you have had a:

- duodenal or pancreatic tumor
- gastrectomy or pancreatectomy
- Whipple procedure

Without pancreatic enzymes, nutrition from your food may not get absorbed. This puts you at risk of dehydration and malnutrition.

Malnutrition:

- raises your risk for other health problems
- slows healing
- makes you more likely to get sick

## What do I need?

**The pancreatic enzyme I'm taking is:**

I need to take:

\_\_\_\_\_ pill(s) each meal.

\_\_\_\_\_ pill(s) each snack.

The amount or type of enzymes you need can change over time. If your symptoms return or do not improve, you may need a different type or dose.

Regular visits with your healthcare team can help you find what works best for you.

## How much do I take?

Your healthcare team (doctor, dietitian, nurse, or pharmacist) can help you with your dose.

Your dose depends on:

- the type or strength
- how long you have been taking them (starting out or have been taking them for a while)

After you start taking pancreatic enzymes, you may notice one or all of the following:

- your poop will be soft
- you will poop a greater amount
- you will feel better

## When do I take them?

### Meals and snacks

Take your pancreatic enzymes at the start of each time you eat. If you are taking more than one capsule, these can be taken together at the start or spread throughout the meal.

You may need to take repeat doses if at a buffet or are eating more than one course, such as an appetizer, entrée, and dessert. Talk to your healthcare team about your doses for these situations.

Some people will feel better when they take all capsules at the start. Others may feel better when they spread them out. Each person is different.

### Drinks

Take pancreatic enzymes when you have a drink with fat or protein in it. This includes:

- milk or cream, plant-based beverages, yogurt drinks, and drinks made with these like lattes, milkshakes, smoothies, ayran, and lassi
- nutrition supplement drinks (like Ensure® or Boost®)

You don't need to take pancreatic enzymes with drinks like fruit juice, sugary drinks, and pop.

## Tips

Try these tips while you follow the directions from your healthcare team.

### Taking pancreatic enzymes

- Swallow your capsules whole with water. Most capsules are coated to start working in the bowel.
- **Do not** crush or chew capsules unless you are told to.
- If swallowing the capsule is difficult:
  1. Open the capsule.
  2. Sprinkle the contents onto a spoonful of water or fruit puree, like applesauce.
    - Speak to your healthcare team before taking the contents with anything other than water or fruit puree.
  3. Swallow the mixture right away. Don't chew.
- Don't worry if you miss a dose. Start with your next dose when you have your next meal or snack.
- You might need more if you eat higher fat foods, such as fast food, deep-fried, fried foods, cream sauce, or gravy.
- Avoid taking at the same time as antacids with calcium or magnesium.

### Storing pancreatic enzymes

- Store at room temperature. Heat can damage the enzymes.
  - Don't keep them in your vehicle on a hot day, in direct sunlight, or near other heat sources like a stove or oven.

## For more support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit [ahs.ca/Nutrition](https://www.ahs.ca/Nutrition).