

Nutrition and neuroendocrine tumours (NETs): pancreas surgery

Nutrition and dietetics [Patient information](#)

Types of pancreas surgery for NETs

The type of surgery you have depends on where the tumour is in your pancreas. Common types are:

- Distal pancreatectomy - removal of pancreas tail.
- Whipples or pylorus preserving pancreaticoduodenectomy (PPPD) - removal of head and/or neck of pancreas. This surgery also removes the start of the small bowel, the gallbladder, and the bile duct.
- Total pancreatectomy - removal of the whole pancreas.

Please speak to your NET nurse or dietitian for advice if you are not sure what surgery you had or if you had a different type of pancreas surgery.

General advice after leaving hospital

- Drink fluids often. Sip water or other drinks through the day.
- Eat little and often
- Eat a protein rich food at every meal. Protein rich foods include eggs, meat, fish, dairy, nuts, beans, lentils, and tofu.
- If you are losing weight include snacks, puddings, and milky drinks. Speak to your nurse or dietitian.

Potential problems after surgery

1. Pancreatic exocrine insufficiency

This is very common after Whipples/PPPD or total pancreatectomy. It is less common after distal pancreatectomy.

Normally your pancreas makes enzymes that help your body break down your food fully. If part or all the pancreas has been removed, then you may not make enough enzymes. This can cause a range of symptoms including:

- lots of wind
- tummy cramps or pain
- bloating
- steatorrhoea. Poo may be pale (cream/yellow/grey), oily, greasy, floating and difficult to flush away, frothy and/or very smelly
- weight loss.

Tell your NET dietitian, nurse, or doctor if you have these symptoms. This is important. You will be prescribed pancreatic enzymes to help your body break down your food properly.

These may be called Creon® or Nutrizym®:

- Suggested starting dose: One capsule with each snack or milky drink. Two capsules with each meal.
- The dose may need to be increased until your symptoms have stopped or are better.
- Take your first capsule with your first mouthful of food, sip of milky drink, or prescribed nutritional supplement drink. Then spread them over the period of eating or drinking.
- Do not take with hot liquids
- Store capsules under 25 degrees C.
- They do not usually need to be taken with fruit juice, fruit, vegetables, fizzy drinks, or squash.
- If you eat slowly or have multiple courses, you should take some at the start and some part way through the meal, or with each course.
- The enzymes are produced from pigs and there are no effective vegan alternatives. Please speak to your dietitian or nurse if this is a concern.

2. Vitamin and mineral deficiency

If you need to take enzymes, you may be more at risk of low levels of vitamins A, D, E, and K. Taking enzymes will help your body to absorb these vitamins better.

You may need blood tests to check your vitamin levels. You may need supplements if they are low. Everyone in the UK is advised to take a 10 micrograms (400IU) vitamin D supplement in winter (October to March). Taking your vitamin supplements with food and enzymes will help your body to absorb them.

After Whipples/PPPD/total pancreatectomy surgery you will need to take:

- a daily A-Z multivitamin and mineral
- a combined calcium and vitamin D supplement

Speak to your dietitian or nurse if you are unsure what you should be taking.

3. Diabetes

Depending on several factors you may develop diabetes after your pancreas surgery. This is because the pancreas produces hormones (chemicals) that control our blood sugar levels.

Symptoms of diabetes are:

- feeling very thirsty
- losing weight
- feeling very tired
- passing a lot of urine
- genital itching

If you have these symptoms, you should contact your NET nurse or GP.

You may need to start tablets or insulin injections. These will help to control your blood sugar levels. You may also need to make some changes to your diet. A diabetes nurse and dietitian can help you with these changes if needed.

Surgery or starting enzyme tablets may change your blood sugar levels if you already had diabetes. Your medication or insulin may need to be adjusted by your diabetes nurse or doctor.

Alternative diets

There are a lot of diets and/or foods in the newspapers or online that can claim to cure or improve cancer. Most of these diets are not proven to work and can even be unsafe. The safest approach is to follow a varied and balanced diet. This helps you to get all the energy, protein, vitamins, and minerals you need.

Speak to a dietitian if you would like to try a certain diet or supplements. They can check that your diet will still provide everything your body needs.

Useful contact details and resources

Ruth Lee

Neuroendocrine oncology dietitian
Wessex NET group

Tel: **07887 832343**

Email: **ruth.lee4@nhs.net**

Macmillan Cancer Support

www.macmillan.org.uk

or **0808 8080000**

National cancer charity

Neuroendocrine Cancer UK:

www.neuroendocrinecancer.org.uk

National charity for NET patients

PLANETS cancer charity

www.planetscharity.org

Local Wessex charity for NET patients

Creon booklet

- for more information on enzyme tablets

www.creon.co.uk/-/media/creoncouk/assets/pdf/2024/uk_non_2024_00104_pert-booklet-printed-version.pdf



University Hospitals Dorset
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