

Dietary Advice for Acute Pancreatitis

Information for patients

What is the pancreas?

The pancreas is a small gland located behind the stomach.

It has two main functions:

1. It produces digestive enzymes which help break down the food we eat (exocrine function)
2. It produces hormones, including insulin, which allows our body to use the glucose (sugar) we eat for energy (endocrine function).

What is acute pancreatitis?

Acute pancreatitis is a condition when the pancreas suddenly becomes inflamed or swollen.

Symptoms may include:

- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Severe abdominal pain often associated with eating
- High temperature or fever.

What causes acute pancreatitis?

Acute pancreatitis is more commonly caused by:

- Gallstones – this can temporarily cause a blockage in the pancreatic duct
- Having an ERCP – an endoscopy procedure to diagnose and treat problems with the pancreas or bile duct
- Increased alcohol consumption - this can cause damage to the pancreas.

Avoiding alcohol for several months would be recommended in this case.

Your consultant/GP will advise you on this fully as you may be advised to avoid alcohol long term.

For some people there is no known cause or trigger for pancreatitis, this is known as 'idiopathic pancreatitis'.

Eating and drinking with a flare up of acute pancreatitis

Your symptoms will be managed by the consultant and your medical team. Once under better control, you should be encouraged to eat and drink as tolerated. Initially, you may find foods higher in fat cause more pain. It may be recommended to opt for foods lower in fat to manage this.

Tips for reducing fat in your diet at home

- Avoid processed, battered and convenience foods. This includes takeaways and some ready meals. Try to make more meals from scratch where possible.
- Look at food labels, opting for foods containing less than 3g of fat per 100g.
- Avoid foods with a red traffic light colour for fat.
- Use healthier cooking methods such as grilling, boiling, steaming, and poaching, rather than roasting or frying.

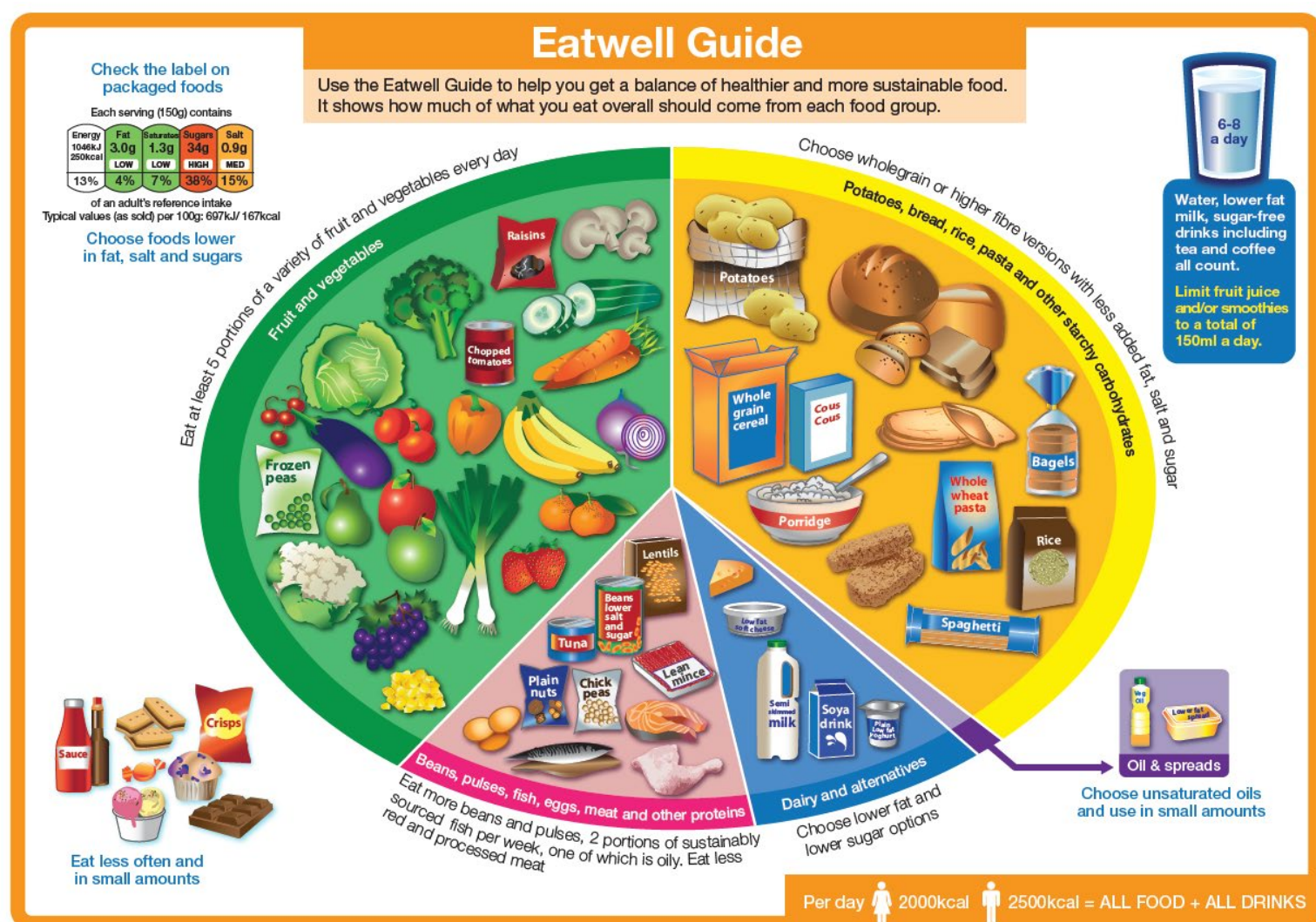
The table below gives examples of foods to avoid and suitable alternatives to have during episodes of flare ups:

Food group	Suitable low-fat options	Higher fat options to avoid
Meat	Lean red meat, chicken, turkey (no skin), gammon. 5% fat mince – use this to make homemade burgers	Deep fried/fatty meats, lamb, goose, duck, sausage, burgers, corned beef, pork pie, pastry pies, bacon rashers, salami
Fish	Tinned fish in brine or tomato sauce, white fish eg. cod, plaice	Very oily fish, deep fried fish in batter or breadcrumbs, tinned fish in oil
Milk/dairy	Semi-skimmed or skimmed milk, low fat cheeses eg. cottage cheese, reduced fat cheese, quark. Low fat yoghurts, note many “high protein” yoghurts are often low in fat	Full cream/whole milk, evaporated or condensed milk, full fat or “creamy” yoghurts, cream, full fat cheeses eg. Brie, stilton, paneer, halloumi
Eggs	Plain scrambles, poached, boiled	Fried, scotch eggs
Lentils/pulses	All lentils, beans, pulses	Avoid if in a creamy sauce
Fruit	All dried, tinned, and fresh fruit	Avocado
Vegetables	All vegetables and salad	Roast, fried, or battered vegetables
Potatoes	Oven chips, jacket potato, plain mashed or boiled potatoes	Deep fried chips, waffles, croquettes, crisps, potato salad made with mayonnaise, mash made with cream/butter/cheese
Rice and pasta	Boiled rice, pasta, and noodles	Fried rice and noodles
Cereals/bread	All flour, cereals, and most breads including crumpets and pancakes	Naan, croissants, Italian bread (ie. Oily focaccia), cheesy bread, scones
Fats, oils, dressings	Low fat spread, tomato ketchup, BBQ, salsa, tomato based sauces, passata, pickle, soy sauce, instant gravy	Butter, oil, lard, ghee, suet, mayonnaise, salad cream, oil dressings, hummus, tartare sauce, curry sauce, gravy made from dripping
Ready made meals	Choose reduced fat options	Curries, masalas, dahl, lasagne, pizza, quiche, pies, chicken kiev
Snacks	Plain popcorn, rice cakes, crackers, plain pretzels, reduced fat crisps eg. Skips/Quavers, PopChips	Onion bhajis, samosa, nuts, potato crisps, spring rolls, pastries, sausage rolls, Bombay Mix
Sweets	Pastilles, fruit gums, boiled/jelly sweets, liquorice, marshmallows	Chocolate, tablet, fudge

Puddings, cakes, pastries	Jelly, sorbet, meringue, Angel Delight made with skimmed milk, iced buns, teacake, Jaffa Cakes, Rich Tea, Ginger Snaps	Ice-cream, custard, tarts, gateaux, cheesecake, doughnuts, sponge cakes, scones, Digestives, shortbread, cream-filled biscuits, chocolate biscuits, traybakes, flapjacks, dumplings, Cornish pasty, Danish pastry
Sugar, spreads, preserves	Sugar, sweeteners, lemon curd, jams, syrup, treacle, yeast extracts	Peanut butter, chocolate spread, Biscoff spread
Drinks	Water, tea, fruit juice, squash, fizzy drinks	Full fat milk drinks (including latte, flat white, hot chocolate, chai), smoothies with full fat milk or yoghurt, lassi, alcohol

Longer term eating and drinking advice

Once an acute episode of pancreatitis has settled, most people can return to eating and drinking normally. Be mindful that it is recommended to follow a healthy and well-balance diet, as shown in the Eatwell Guide below:



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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If your pancreatitis was triggered by gallstones you should aim to reduce the fat content of your normal everyday diet as gallstones can be caused by high levels of cholesterol in bile, which forms into stones. You should focus on eating more protein and carbohydrate foods and may wish to use the Eatwell Guide overleaf to make informed dietary choices.

Nutritional support

Alternatively, after an attack of acute pancreatitis you may have unintentionally lost weight and/or your appetite may remain poor during recovery. If you do not require a low-fat diet you should aim to consume high calorie foods in the short term to regain or maintain your current weight. If you have been recommended to follow a low-fat diet it can be tricky to consume enough calories; we recommend:

1. Trying a “little and often” eating pattern – aiming to have 3 small meals and 2-3 good sized snacks daily or a milk-based drink
2. Avoiding “sugar free” versions of foods and drinks
3. Trying to have 2 courses at meal times – a main course plus eg. Cheese & crackers, pineapple cottage cheese, frozen yoghurt with fruit, rice pudding
4. Trying to include a good source of protein at all meals, eg. Meat, fish, cheese, eggs, beans, lentils
5. Trying milk-based drinks – skimmed or semi skimmed milk to make coffees, hot chocolate, milkshakes, fortified milk
6. Using “high protein” yoghurts for breakfast, snacks, smoothies, or in cooking. Many “high protein” branded yoghurts are low in fat content
7. Using skimmed milk powder in soups, sauces, and milky desserts – additional calories come from protein sources rather than fat sources
8. You can use over-the-counter fortified drinks such as Complan or Mertiene which can be purchased in supermarkets or chemists.

How to make fortified milk:

1. Add 4 tablespoons of skimmed milk powder to 1 pint of milk
2. Stir well, until dissolved
3. Store in the fridge and use full amount within 24 hours – add to drinks or sauces in cooking

If you require additional nutritional support, you will be seen by a dietitian who may prescribe Oral Nutritional Supplement drinks. Alternatively, if you were not seen by a dietitian during your hospital stay and your food intake has not improved at home or you are continuing to lose weight after 2-3 weeks post-discharge, contact your GP for a dietetic referral.

Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement Therapy

When the pancreas is inflamed it may not be producing enough enzymes which results in food and drinks not being absorbed well. This would be determined by scans, a stool sample, or you may be asked about your symptoms to evaluate if you are not absorbing all food and drinks.

In this case you may be prescribed pancreatic enzymes to take as a capsule with all food and milk-based drinks. If this is required a dietitian will carry out a consultation with you to provide all the information you require for this medicine.

