

DIET GUIDELINES FOR PANCREATITIS

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Pancreatitis is inflammation of the pancreas. Digestive enzymes secreted by the pancreas into the intestinal tract can attack and damage the inside of the pancreas. Both acute and chronic pancreatitis require medical treatment and diet therapy. The goal of diet therapy for pancreatitis is to avoid irritation of the pancreas and manage symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, while still meeting a patient's nutrient needs.

Rationale

The pancreas is a digestive organ that releases enzymes and hormones that help to break down food and absorb nutrients. Patients with pancreatitis may have impaired digestion and absorption of fat, which can cause abdominal pain and oily stools. Foods low in fat and high in protein and carbohydrates decrease the workload of the pancreas. In addition, some patients with chronic pancreatitis may have to take pancreatic enzymes before each meal.

Guidelines

A healthy eating plan for pancreatitis includes nonfat and low-fat foods from all five food groups. Adults should consume at least three 1 oz. servings of grains. Doctors especially encourage high-fiber versions of grain foods. Patients should have 2 1/2 to 3 cups vegetables and 2 cups fruits per day in a variety of colors. Due to a high fat content, avocados are excluded from this diet. Lean cuts of meat, skinless poultry, fish and beans should be prepared without added fat, and a 5 to 6 oz. serving is recommended. Experts advise 3 cups of fat free or 1 percent milk dairy products a day. Fats and oils are limited to no more than 8 tsp. daily.

Suggestions

Caffeine, spicy foods and gas-forming foods stimulate the pancreas and

could exacerbate symptoms during an acute attack. Eating small, frequent meals such as six meals a day may aid with digestion. Patients with chronic pancreatitis often have low blood levels of antioxidants that reduce inflammation and tissue damage. Some studies suggest that antioxidant supplements that include vitamin C, vitamin E, selenium, and beta carotene may decrease pain and reduce the need for pancreatic surgery for patients with chronic pancreatitis. Patients should seek a physician's advice.

Considerations

Maintaining a healthy weight is important because obesity can increase the risk of developing pancreatitis, exacerbate the severity of illness in patients with pancreatitis, and heighten the presence of associated complications, such as gallstones. Some patients with pancreatitis have a high blood glucose and should avoid concentrated sweets. Alcohol and tobacco must be avoided, as usage both raises the risk of developing pancreatitis and the chances of an acute attack in patients with chronic pancreatitis.

Sample Menu

Breakfast could include 6 oz. tomato juice, 1/2 cup of scrambled liquid egg substitute and 1 cup shredded wheat cereal with 8 oz. skim milk. Lunch could be 2 oz. lean turkey, two slices of whole grain bread, lettuce, tomato, honey mustard, 1 cup carrots, an apple and 8 oz. skim milk. Dinner might be 4 oz. baked chicken breast, 1 cup pasta with tomato sauce, 1 cup mixed green salad with 2 tbsp. fat free dressing, two slices of Italian bread with 1 tsp. reduced fat margarine, 1 cup fat free fruit flavored yogurt and 8 oz. diet ginger ale.