

# Stents for a blocked duodenum

This fact sheet is for people with pancreatic cancer who are having a stent put in to treat a blocked duodenum. Families may also find it helpful. It explains what stents are, when they are used, how they are put in, possible problems and managing your diet with a stent. There is also information about the support available to you.

Every hospital will do things slightly differently so use this fact sheet as a general guide. Ask your doctor or nurse for more information about your treatment.



You can also speak to our specialist nurses on our confidential Support Line. Call free on **0808 801 0707** or email **nurse@pancreaticcancer.org.uk**

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## Key facts

- The duodenum is the first part of the small intestine. After you eat, food moves from your stomach into your duodenum where it is broken down (digested).
- Pancreatic cancer can block the duodenum. This happens when the cancer presses on the duodenum and stops the food passing out of the stomach. This is called gastric outlet obstruction.
- It can make you feel full up, feel sick, vomit large amounts, lose weight and have tummy pain, bloating and cramps.
- A stent is a tube. It can be used to hold open the duodenum and let the food pass through.
- Once you have a stent put in, you should start to feel better quite quickly. It should stop you being sick, and you should start to feel like eating again.
- Treating your symptoms with the stent may mean you can start or continue treatment for the cancer.
- Putting the stent in takes around 30-40 minutes. You will be given a sedative to make you feel relaxed and sleepy.
- Sometimes there can be problems with stents including blockages. Less often, the stent may move out of place, you may have some discomfort or you may get an infection.
- You should be given information to help you with your diet after you have the stent put in. You will need to be careful about what you eat to stop the stent getting blocked.
- Talk to your medical team about any questions you have. You can also speak to our specialist nurses on our free Support Line.

## Treating a blocked duodenum

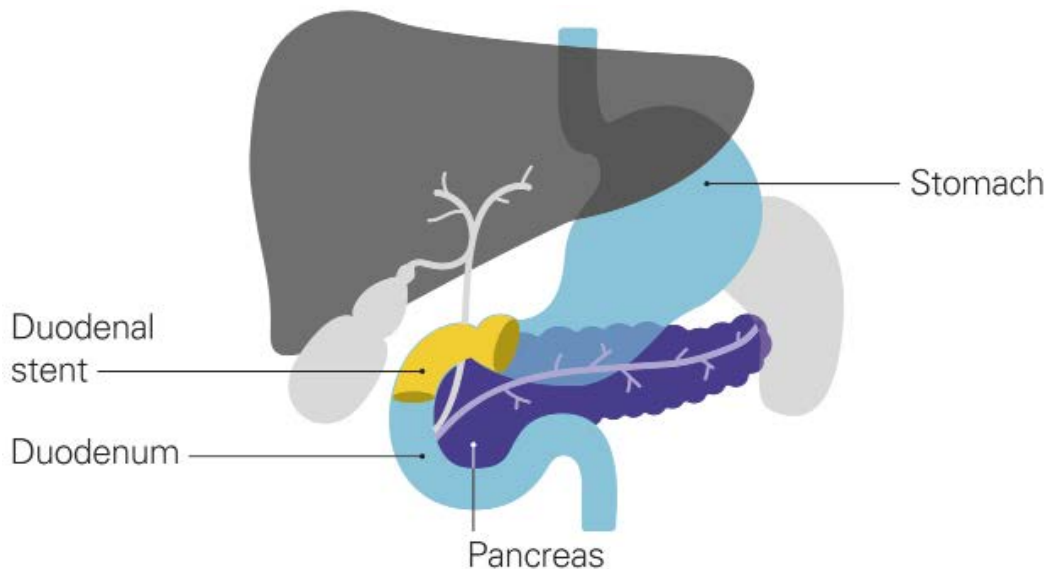
The first part of the small intestine is called the duodenum. Pancreatic cancer can block the duodenum. This can make you feel and be sick. A tube called a stent can be put into the duodenum to treat this.

# What are stents and when are they used?

Stents are tubes. A stent for the duodenum is called a duodenal stent. You may have a duodenal stent put in if your cancer can't be removed by surgery. If you are having longer term treatment and are well enough, your doctor should consider bypass surgery rather than a stent.

Stents are also used to treat a blocked bile duct – these are called biliary stents.

## Diagram showing a duodenal stent



Read more about bypass surgery on our website at:  
[pancreaticcancer.org.uk/bypass](https://pancreaticcancer.org.uk/bypass)

Read more about biliary stents for a blocked bile duct in our fact sheet: **Stents to treat jaundice caused by a blocked bile duct.**

Or on our website at: [pancreaticcancer.org.uk/biliarystent](https://pancreaticcancer.org.uk/biliarystent)



### Questions to ask the doctor or nurse

Will a stent improve my symptoms?

How quickly will I recover after the stent is put in?

Will I need to change my diet once I have a stent?

Will I see a dietitian?

Will a stent affect future treatment such as chemotherapy?

Will a stent mean I can start or continue treatment?

Will I feel the stent inside me?

Will the stent ever need to be removed?

## Advantages and disadvantages of stents

### Advantages

- The stent should open the blocked duodenum and treat your sickness.
- You should start feeling better quickly, normally within a couple of days of having the stent put in.
- Treating symptoms may mean you can start or continue treatment for the cancer, such as chemotherapy.

### Disadvantages

- The stent may get blocked and the symptoms you had before may come back.
- Some people may still feel sick after having a stent put in. If this doesn't get better speak to your doctor.
- There is a small chance of your stent moving after it has been put in. If this happens it may need to be replaced.
- There is a small risk of complications such as a hole in the duodenum or bleeding. A hole in the duodenum can also cause infection.

# How is the duodenal stent put in?

You may go into hospital the day before the stent is put in, or on the day. You will be asked not to eat or drink for at least eight hours before to make sure that your stomach and duodenum are as empty as possible. Tell your doctor or nurse if you take blood thinning medicine or have diabetes, as this might affect your care before the stent is put in.

You will have a sedative, which will make you very sleepy and relaxed. A tube with a camera on the end, called an endoscope, is put in through your mouth and down into the duodenum. A fine wire is then used to guide the stent into place inside the duodenum. The procedure takes 30-40 minutes.

## What happens afterwards?

Once the sedative wears off, you will usually be able to drink. Once you can drink without problems you will be able to eat. At first you will have softer foods so that the stent does not get blocked.

Sometimes it can take a while for your stomach to start emptying properly again. You may be given medicine to help your stomach empty.

You may need to stay in hospital overnight, but this will depend on how quickly you recover.

If your stent gets blocked, you may feel or be sick. If this happens after you have left hospital, contact your doctor or nurse. Or go to A&E if you can't reach them.

## Will I feel better?

After the stent has been put in your symptoms should begin to improve. For example, you should stop feeling sick and find it easier to eat.

Some people may still feel sick after having a stent put in. This is because food will move through the stent differently to how it moves through the duodenum. This means food may stay in the stomach for longer. Speak to your doctor if this does not get better. They may give you anti-sickness medicines and suggest changes to your diet.

You will need to be careful what you eat to make sure the stent does not get blocked. If you need advice or are having problems speak to your nurse or dietitian.



You can also speak to our specialist nurses on our Support Line with any questions.

## How should I manage my diet with a duodenal stent?

Pancreatic cancer can reduce the number of enzymes your pancreas makes, which help break down (digest) food. You can take pancreatic enzymes to deal with this and help you digest your food properly.

You should get information about your diet after having the stent put in. You will have softer foods at first. It may help to start with semi-liquid or pureed foods and then move on to soft foods.

**You will need to be careful about what you eat to make sure the stent doesn't get blocked. These tips may help.**

- Take your time eating, and make sure you chew your food well.
- Eat smaller meals more often.
- Eat a variety of foods to make sure you get enough nutrients.
- Sit up when you eat and don't lie down after meals. This will help to digest your food.
- Avoid drinking too much with your meals as this can fill you up.

**You will need to eat soft foods that are easy to chew, such as:**

- porridge or cereal soaked in milk
- pureed soup (add cream, milk or cheese for extra nutrients and calories)
- poached fish or minced meat
- eggs, including poached and scrambled eggs or an omelette
- soft pasta dishes, such as macaroni cheese
- mashed potato (add butter, cream or cheese for more calories)
- vegetables well cooked until they are soft
- rice pudding, stewed fruit, yoghurt, custard or ice cream.

**Try to avoid foods that might block the stent. These include:**

- raw vegetables or vegetables that are harder to digest, such as salads, celery, green beans and sweetcorn
- nuts and dried fruit
- citrus fruits like oranges or grapefruit – this is because of the skin around each segment
- tough or gristly meat
- bread, as it expands in your stomach
- wholegrain foods, such as wholegrain pasta or rice, as they are more difficult to digest.

If you are not sure if you can still eat your preferred foods, speak to your doctor, nurse or dietitian.



Read more about eating, diet and pancreatic enzymes in our booklet: **Diet and pancreatic cancer**  
Or on our website at: [pancreaticcancer.org.uk/diet](https://pancreaticcancer.org.uk/diet)



You can also talk to the specialist nurses on our Support Line for information about diet with a duodenal stent.

# Are there any problems with stents?

## Blockages

The main problem with stents is that they can get blocked. This can be caused by the cancer growing through the stent or by food building up inside it. If you start feeling or being sick again, speak to your doctor or nurse. Or go to A&E if you can't reach them. They can check if the stent is blocked.

If this happens another stent can be put in to treat the blockage. Your nurse or dietitian should tell you what foods to stop the stent getting blocked. Read more about eating and diet on page 6.

## Stent moving out of place

Sometimes stents can move out of place. If this happens the stent is usually removed and a new one put in. Tummy pain or vomiting may be signs that your stent has moved. Speak to your doctor or nurse if you get any of these symptoms. They can decide if the stent needs to be replaced.

## Discomfort

Occasionally stents cause discomfort in the upper tummy when they are first put in. This is not common and normally gets better over a few days.

## Other possible problems

There are some other possible problems from having a stent put in, but these are very rare. For example, there is a risk of the procedure causing a hole in the duodenum during or after the stent is put in. This can cause bleeding, being sick, or an infection. There is also a small risk of infection caused by the stent getting blocked.

If you have any side effects or unusual symptoms after you have left hospital, phone your nurse or doctor. If you can't reach them, go to A&E.

If you have any questions or worries about having a stent put in, or after the stent has been put in, speak to your medical team.



You can also speak to our specialist nurses on our free Support Line about problems with duodenal stents.



# More information and support

## Pancreatic Cancer UK support

We are here for everyone affected by pancreatic cancer.

### Our specialist nurses are here to talk now

If your world has been turned upside down by a pancreatic cancer diagnosis, we are here to talk now. We can answer your questions, recommend practical steps and provide the emotional support you and those close to you need, when you need it most.

Call free on **0808 801 0707** or email **nurse@pancreaticcancer.org.uk**

### Expert information

Our free information covers everything about pancreatic cancer to help you understand your diagnosis, ask questions, make decisions and live as well as you can.

Go to: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/information**

Download or order our free publications at **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/publications** or call **0808 801 0707**

### Our online forum

The forum is a supportive online space where everyone affected by pancreatic cancer can be there for each other at any time.

Go to: **forum.pancreaticcancer.org.uk**

### Our online support sessions

Our online support sessions are hosted by our specialist pancreatic cancer nurses and will give you the chance to connect with others who have also been diagnosed.

Go to: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/supportsessions**

### Real life stories

Read other people's experiences of pancreatic cancer to find out how they coped with their diagnosis and treatment and their tips on looking after themselves.

Go to: **pancreaticcancer.org.uk/stories**

## Useful organisations

### **Cancer Research UK**

**[cancerresearchuk.org](http://cancerresearchuk.org)**

**Helpline: 0808 800 4040** (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm)

Information for anyone affected by cancer.

### **Healthtalk.org**

Personal experiences presented in written, audio and video formats, including people talking about pancreatic cancer.

### **Macmillan Cancer Support**

**[macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)**

**Support Line: 0808 808 00 00** (Every day, 8am-8pm)

Provides practical, medical and financial support for anyone affected by cancer.

### **Maggie's**

**[maggies.org](http://maggies.org)**

**Tel: 0300 123 1801**

Centres around the UK and online offer free practical, emotional and social support for anyone affected by cancer.

### **National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)**

**[nice.org.uk](http://nice.org.uk)**

NICE provide guidance, advice and information for health professionals. They have produced guidelines for the diagnosis and care of people with pancreatic cancer:

**[nice.org.uk/guidance/ng85](http://nice.org.uk/guidance/ng85)**

This fact sheet has been produced by the Support and Information Team at Pancreatic Cancer UK.

We make every effort to make sure that our services provide up-to-date, accurate information about pancreatic cancer. We hope this will add to the medical advice you have had, and help you make decisions about your treatment and care. This information should not replace advice from the medical team – please speak to your doctor, nurse or other members of your medical team about any questions.

Email us at **publications@pancreaticcancer.org.uk** for references to the sources of information used to write this fact sheet.

### **Give us your feedback**

We hope you have found this information helpful. We are always keen to improve our information, so let us know if you have any comments or suggestions.

Email us at **publications@pancreaticcancer.org.uk** or write to our Information Manager at the address below.

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© Pancreatic Cancer UK October 2023  
Review date October 2026

Registered charity number 1112708 (England and Wales), and SC046392 (Scotland)