3.42 Carbohydrate Digestion in the Small Intestine

The small intestine is the primary site of carbohydrate digestion. Pancreatic alpha-amylase is the primary carbohydrate digesting enzyme. Pancreatic alpha-amylase, like salivary amylase, cleaves the alpha 1-4 glycosidic bonds of carbohydrates, reducing them to simpler carbohydrates, such as glucose, maltose, maltotriose, and dextrins (oligosaccharides containing 1 or more alpha 1-6 glycosidic bonds). Pancreatic amylase is also unable to cleave the branch point alpha 1-6 bonds.

![Figure 3.421 The function of pancreatic amylase](image)

The pancreatic amylase products, along with the disaccharides sucrose and lactose, then move to the surface of the enterocyte. Here, there are disaccharidase enzymes (lactase, sucrase, maltase) on the outside of the enterocyte. Enzymes, like these, that are on the outside of cell walls are referred to as ectoenzymes. Individual monosaccharides are formed when lactase cleaves lactose, sucrase cleaves sucrose, and maltase cleaves maltose. There is also another brush border enzyme, alpha-dextrinase. This enzyme cleaves alpha 1-6 glycosidic bonds in dextrins, primarily the branch point bonds in amylopectin. The products from these brush border enzymes are the single monosaccharides glucose, fructose, and galactose that are ready for absorption into the enterocyte.

![Figure 3.422 Products of pancreatic amylase](image)
Figure 3.423 Disaccharidases on the outside of the enterocyte.

**References & Links**