

Gastroparesis or delayed gastric emptying

This resource is for people who have been diagnosed with gastroparesis, also known as delayed gastric (stomach) emptying. It provides information on dietary changes that can help you get enough nutrition when you have this condition.

What is gastroparesis?

Gastroparesis is a condition in which the stomach empties too slowly. This causes the movement of food from the stomach to the small bowel (intestine) to slow down or stop.

What causes gastroparesis?

It is not always possible to know the cause of gastroparesis. In some cases, damage to the vagus nerve which controls stomach movement may occur. It can happen because of:

- surgery to the stomach or bowel
- poorly controlled blood sugar levels in people with diabetes
- viruses
- medications
- diseases of the nervous system such as Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis.

Symptoms of gastroparesis

Symptoms of gastroparesis are different for each person. Some of the symptoms that people experience are:

- nausea
- vomiting
- feeling full quickly (early satiety)
- abdominal (stomach) pain
- bloating
- poor appetite
- reflux (heartburn)

Severity of symptoms can vary, which can make it hard to eat or drink normally. Some people with gastroparesis can still eat their usual diet but may have to eat smaller amounts.

For others, it can be very difficult to eat or drink anything at all when symptoms are severe. Symptoms may change over time depending on the cause of gastroparesis.

Keeping healthy with gastroparesis

It can be hard to meet your nutritional needs when you have gastroparesis. It can cause weight loss without trying, low vitamin and mineral levels, dehydration, and loss of energy. Talk to your doctor and dietitian regularly to help monitor and manage your symptoms.

Some medications can help you eat with gastroparesis. These medications (often also used for nausea) can help the stomach empty more quickly. Take them 30 minutes before a meal to reduce symptoms or as advised by your doctor. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about these medications.

If you have diabetes, controlling your blood sugar levels may help prevent your gastroparesis from getting worse. Your doctor or dietitian can provide you with further information on managing blood sugar levels.

What should I eat if I have gastroparesis?

You may need to change your diet depending on the severity of your symptoms.

- Eat small meals to help your stomach to empty faster.
Note: When having smaller meals, you will need to eat and drink more often to meet your nutrition needs e.g. 4 - 6 small meals per day.
- Make sure the foods that you eat are good sources of energy (calories) and protein. Your dietitian can provide you with more information on meeting energy and protein needs.
- Cook foods well so they are soft and easy to chew.
- Chew foods well, especially meats to help the enzymes in saliva to start digestion (breaking food into smaller parts to be used by the body).
- Avoid foods that are high in fibre as they can make you feel full and slow down stomach emptying. High fibre foods include wholemeal/wholegrain breads and cereals, certain fruits and vegetables (particularly with skin, stalks, pips or seeds), nuts and seeds, and legumes (e.g. baked beans, lentils). Your dietitian can provide you with more information on a low fibre diet.

- High fat foods can slow down stomach emptying (e.g. fried foods, pastries, baked foods, fatty meats). Fats in liquid form (e.g. full cream milk, nutritional supplements, or yoghurt) are usually better tolerated.
- Don't drink with meals - have fluids at least 30 minutes before or after eating, and limit carbonated beverages that can increase bloating.
- Avoid alcohol that can further impair gastric emptying.
- Remain upright for 1 to 2 hours after eating (sitting or a light walk).

What if I am still finding eating difficult?

If you are still finding it difficult to eat, you may need to try soft or pureed foods. Then you could try mostly liquids or liquid-like foods. This is because softer and more liquid foods pass through the stomach more quickly than solids. Some people find they can manage solid foods at the beginning of the day but need to change to a puree or liquid diet in the afternoon or evening as symptoms worsen.

Pureed or blended foods

Puree or blend using a blender, stick mixer or food processor.

- Blend meat / chicken / fish dishes with gravy or sauce.
- Mash or puree vegetables with gravy, broth, sauce, milk, or cream.
- Add sauce or other liquids to mixed dishes such as lasagne, spaghetti Bolognese or stir-fries and blend.
- Your dietitian will give you more information on a pureed diet if needed.
- For blended recipe ideas, search 'Beyond the Blender' here:
<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/nutrition/patients>

Liquids high in energy and nutrients

- Milk is a common base for nourishing drinks as it is high in protein and energy. Full cream milk contains more energy than reduced fat, so it is better to use if tolerated. Soy milk with added vitamins and calcium or lactose free milk is also suitable.
- Add other ingredients to make your milk higher in protein and energy. Try adding ice-cream, cream, flavoured powders (e.g. Milo®, Nesquik®) and syrups (e.g. ice-cream toppings, maple syrup, or honey).

- Fruit and vegetable juices are not very good sources of protein or energy. Add supplement powders (such as Sustagen® Neutral, Ensure® Neutral or AdVital®) to make vegetable and fruit juices more nourishing.
- Add high protein / energy supplement powders to soups and broths.
- Other liquid-like foods such as yoghurt and custard are also good sources of energy and nutrients.
- Your dietitian will give you more information if you need to follow a strict liquid diet.

Summary:

- Have small, frequent foods and fluids, and chew foods well.
- Avoid high fat and high fibre foods which slow down stomach emptying. Fat in a liquid form is usually tolerated.
- You may need a liquid or pureed diet if you are still struggling to get enough nutrition.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about medications to help your stomach empty faster.

For further information contact your dietitian or nutritionist: _____