

Gastroparesis

What is gastroparesis?

Gastroparesis is a condition in which the stomach empties too slowly. It occurs when the nerve that stimulates the stomach muscles (the vagus nerve) is damaged by illness or injury. This causes the stomach muscles to stop working as they would normally. The movement of food from the stomach to the small intestine is slowed or stops altogether.

What causes gastroparesis?

It is not always possible to know the cause of gastroparesis. It can happen because of:

- surgery that changes the anatomy of the gastrointestinal tract such as gastric bypass surgery
- nerve damage resulting from poorly controlled blood sugar levels in people with diabetes
- 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 undigested foods
- feeling full quickly (early satiety)
- abdominal pain
- bloating
- poor appetite
- reflux.

Symptoms also vary in how severe they are. It can make it hard to eat and 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

When the symptoms of gastroparesis make it difficult to eat and drink normally, it can be hard to meet all of your nutritional needs. This can cause weight loss without trying, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, dehydration, lack of energy and fatigue.

It is important for anyone with gastroparesis to see their doctor and

dietitian regularly. This is to monitor and manage symptoms and nutrition-related side effects.

Some medications can also support eating with gastroparesis. These medications (often also used for nausea) can help the stomach empty more quickly. Symptoms can be reduced by taking them before a meal.

Diet strategies for gastroparesis

Depending on the severity of your symptoms you may need to change your diet.

- Eating small meals may help the stomach to empty faster. When having smaller meals, you will need to eat and drink more often to meet your nutrition needs.
- Make sure the foods that you eat are good sources of energy and protein.
- Cook foods well so they are soft and easy to chew.
- Chew foods well, especially meats.
- Avoid foods that are high in fibre as they can make you feel full and also slow down stomach emptying.
- High fat foods can slow down stomach emptying (e.g. fried foods, pastries, baked foods, fatty meats). However, fats in liquid form (e.g. full cream milk

or yoghurt) are usually better tolerated.

- Don't drink with meals - have fluids at least 30 minutes before or after eating.
- Remain upright for 1 hour after eating (sitting or a light walk).

Further diet changes

If you are still finding it difficult to eat after trying the diet strategies above, you may need to change your food further. First try soft or puree foods. Then you could try mostly liquids or liquid-like foods.

- When pureed foods are mixed with saliva and stomach juices they will pass through the stomach more quickly than solids.
- Liquids empty from the stomach faster than solid foods.
- Liquids are important for hydration and can also provide enough energy and nutrients to meet your needs.

Pureed or vitamised foods

Any food can be pureed or vitamised 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.

- Puree well cooked pasta, noodles or rice in a blender with added sauce.
- Homemade or canned soups are easily pureed in a blender.
- Add sauce or other liquid to mixed dishes such as lasagne, spaghetti Bolognese or stir fries and blend together.
- Semolina and other low fibre breakfast cereals can be pureed with milk, honey or yoghurt added.
- Stewed or canned fruit can be pureed in a blender with their syrup or juice.
- Some fresh fruits such as banana or pawpaw can be pureed.

Energy and nutrient rich liquids

- 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. Fortified soy milk and lactose free milks are also suitable.
- To make your milk higher in protein and energy, other ingredients may be

added. Try adding ice-cream, cream, flavoured powders (such as Milo and Nesquik) and syrups (such as ice-cream toppings and honey).

- Fruit and vegetable juices are not very good sources of protein or energy. Adding supplements that are high protein/energy such as Sustagen Neutral or AdVital will make vegetable and fruit juices more nourishing.
- Soups and broths can also be fortified by adding high protein / energy supplements.
- Other liquid-like foods such as yoghurt and custard are also good sources of energy and nutrients.

Your dietitian has recommended:

- Low fibre diet *
- Soft diet
- Minced/moist diet
- Pureed + fluid diet
- Full liquid diet
- Other: _____

(*Dietitian to attach corresponding diet information as required)

For further information contact your Dietitian or Nutritionist: _____