



Common Questions About Gastroparesis (Delayed Gastric Emptying)

559



International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders (www.iffgd.org)

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What is gastroparesis?

Gastroparesis is a condition where symptoms occur and the stomach empties too slowly. No blockage is evident. The delayed emptying is confirmed by a test.

What are the signs and symptoms of gastroparesis?

Symptoms usually occur during and after eating a meal. Typical symptoms include:

- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Retching (dry heaves)
- Stomach fullness after a normal sized meal
- Early fullness (satiety) – unable to finish a meal

There may also be bloating, heartburn, and stomach discomfort or pain. Decreased appetite may result in weight loss.

What causes gastroparesis?

In most people with gastroparesis, the cause is unknown and is termed “idiopathic.” Symptoms may begin following a virus infection. Other possible causes include diabetes, surgeries, some medications, and other illnesses.

How do I know if I have gastroparesis?

Diagnosis is by a doctor who will perform a physical exam and some tests. Tell your doctor about any medications you are taking. If the doctor suspects gastroparesis, a test to measure how fast the stomach empties is needed to confirm the diagnosis.

How is gastroparesis treated?

Treatments are aimed at managing symptoms over a long-term. This involves one or a combination of dietary and lifestyle measures, medications, and/or procedures that may include surgery.

Mild symptoms that come and go may be managed with dietary and lifestyle measures. Moderate to more severe symptoms additionally may be treated with medicines to stimulate stomach emptying and/or reduce nausea and vomiting.

Severe symptoms that are harder to treat may require added procedures to maintain nutrition and/or reduce symptoms.

Dietary and Lifestyle Measures – A nutrition specialist can help design a dietary plan to meet your needs. If you have diabetes, blood glucose levels will need to be controlled as well as possible. Blood glucose levels go up after stomach contents empty into the small intestine, and this is irregular in gastroparesis.

Medicines – Prokinetic (promotility) agents help the stomach empty more quickly and may improve nausea, vomiting, and bloating. Antiemetic agents are used to treat nausea and vomiting.

Procedures – Severe symptoms sometimes result in dehydration, loss of essential minerals (electrolyte imbalances), and malnutrition requiring hospitalizations. Special treatment measures to help manage may include:

- enteral nutrition,
- parenteral nutrition,
- gastric electrical stimulation, or
- other surgical procedures.

Be sure to ask questions so you understand any treatment and options, know the risks as well as benefits, and know what to do if side effects occur or symptoms return.

Keep hydrated and as nutritionally fit as possible. Persistence pays off, as most people with gastroparesis ultimately will do well.

Where can I learn more?

Learn more on our website at www.aboutGastroparesis.org or in our publication No. 556.

About IFFGD

The International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit education and research organization. We work to promote awareness, scientific advancement, and improved care for people affected by chronic digestive conditions. Our mission is to inform, assist, and support people affected by gastrointestinal disorders. Founded in 1991, we rely on donors to carry out our mission. Visit our website at: www.iffgd.org.

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