

## Patient education: Gastroparesis (delayed gastric emptying) (The Basics)

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

**What is gastroparesis?** — Gastroparesis is a condition that causes nausea and vomiting. It can also make you feel full too soon after you start eating. It happens because the stomach takes too long to empty and does not move food along through your body fast enough ([figure 1](#)). Gastroparesis is also called "delayed gastric emptying." ("Gastric" means "having to do with the stomach.")

Gastroparesis is a common problem among people with diabetes. It also can happen to people who have had food poisoning (gastroenteritis). But it can sometimes happen to people who have not been sick and who do not have diabetes.

When gastroparesis starts after someone has had food poisoning, it often gets better in a few days to weeks. Sometimes it lasts longer or never goes away. In people with diabetes, it usually does not go away, but there are things that can make it better.

**What are the symptoms of gastroparesis?** — The symptoms can include:

- Nausea with or without vomiting
- Belly pain
- Feeling full too soon after you start eating
- Bloating (feeling as though your stomach is full of air)
- Weight loss

**Is there a test for gastroparesis?** — Yes. If your doctor or nurse suspects you have gastroparesis, he or she might do 1 or more of these tests:

- **Endoscopy** — A doctor or nurse puts a thin tube down your throat and into your stomach. The tube (called an endoscope) has a light and a tiny camera on the end, so it allows the doctor or nurse to see inside your stomach. If he or she still finds food in your stomach even though it has been more than 8 hours since you ate, that is a sign that you might have gastroparesis.
- **Barium follow through, CT scan, or MRI** — For these tests you eat a special substance that shows up on imaging. This can show if there is something blocking the flow of food, keeping it from leaving your stomach.
- **Gastric emptying scintigraphy** — For this test you eat food that has a small amount of a radioactive material in it. Then you have images taken of the inside of your body for up to 4 hours. That way, doctors can follow where the food goes and how fast it gets there. If you still have a fair amount of food in your stomach after 4 hours, that means you have gastroparesis.
- **Breath test** — This is a newer test that measures substances in your breath after you have eaten a special meal. The measurements can sometimes show if you have gastroparesis.

**Is there anything I can do on my own to feel better?** — Yes. Some people feel better if they:

- Eat several small meals during the day instead of 2 or 3 big ones.
- Put food through the blender before eating it.

- Cut down on foods that have a lot of fat, such as cheese and fried foods.
- Cut down on foods that have a lot of fiber, such as fruits, vegetables, and beans.

If you have diabetes, it's also very important to keep your blood sugar as close to normal as possible.

**Should I see a doctor or nurse?** — See your doctor or nurse if you have ongoing nausea or vomiting, belly pain, trouble eating, or weight loss.

**How is gastroparesis treated?** — Treatments can include:

- Treatments to help you get the food and fluids you need – This might include taking liquid food supplements or – in rare cases – being fed through a tube.
- Medicines that make the stomach empty faster
- Medicines that help prevent nausea
- Emptying the stomach with a tube – To do this, doctors can put a tube down your throat or directly into your stomach through your skin.
- Electrical stimulation of the stomach – In very rare cases, doctors use electrical stimulation to make the stomach empty.

### More on this topic

[Patient education: Upper endoscopy \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Nausea and vomiting in adults \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Upper endoscopy \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

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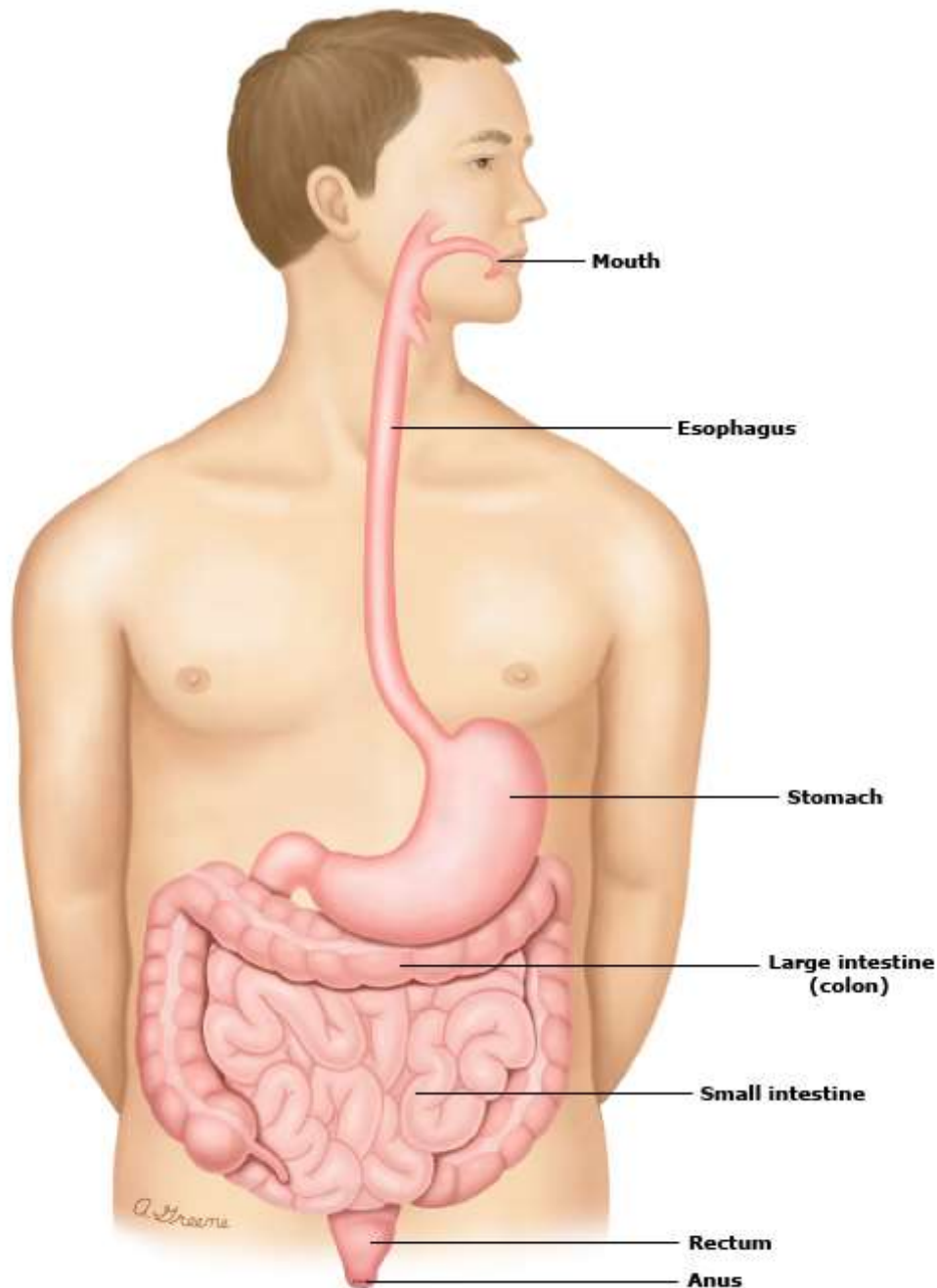
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## GRAPHICS

### Digestive system

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This drawing shows the organs in the body that process food. Together these organs are called "the digestive system," or "digestive tract." As food travels through this system, the body absorbs nutrients and water.

Graphic 66110 Version 4.0