

# Fact Sheet

Central Adelaide Local Health Network  
Diabetes Education Service

## Living Well with Gastroparesis and Diabetes

Gastroparesis is a condition where your stomach empties food slowly. When blood glucose levels stay high for a long time in people with diabetes, it can contribute to damaging the nerves around the stomach. This can cause bloating, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, reflux, reduced appetite, constipation and feeling full quickly after eating. Gastroparesis may also cause weight loss, vitamin and mineral deficiencies and difficulties keeping blood glucose levels in range. Making some changes to your diet may help. A Dietitian can give advice around dietary changes to best suit you and help manage blood glucose levels.

### Tips to help manage your symptoms:

#### 1. Aim to eat small, frequent meals

Eating a large meal can cause the stomach to empty more slowly and may make symptoms worse. Aim to eat small and more frequent meals to allow your body to absorb the nutrients it needs. Try including three small meals per day with small snacks in between.

#### 2. Limit foods high in fat

Foods high in fat are slow to digest and can make symptoms worse. Aim to limit creamy sauces, fried foods and takeaways.

#### 3. Aim to maintain blood glucose levels as close to target as possible

Improving blood glucose control can help improve the symptoms of gastroparesis. High blood glucose levels may cause the stomach to empty more slowly and worsen symptoms.

#### 4. Limit late evening meals and snacks before bed

If eating late at night, try and sit up for at least 1 hour after eating to allow the food to digest before going to bed.

#### 5. Limit drinking fluids with meals

Aim to have fluids separate from meals - try drinking fluids at least 30 minutes before or after eating.

#### 6. Aim to chew foods well

Chewing, pureeing or mashing makes it easier for food to digest once it enters the stomach. Foods such as mashed potato, puree vegetables, minced meat or pureed soups may be better tolerated than harder, larger pieces of food.



## 7. Fibre

If your symptoms do not improve with the above dietary changes, modifying the fibre in your diet might help. Fibre found in many fruits, vegetables and grains may slow the emptying of the stomach, and for some people, can leave you feeling full quickly. Tinned or cooked fruits and vegetables are better tolerated than raw varieties and will still provide lots of vitamins, minerals and fibre. Try peeling fruit and vegetables and/or using white varieties of rice, pasta and bread instead of wholegrain varieties.

## 8. Other considerations

In some people, fizzy drinks can worsen symptoms, so limiting intake is recommended. Alcohol and tobacco smoking can delay the emptying of food from the stomach and should be limited or avoided.

## 9. What to do if feeling unwell and unable to tolerate solids?

Seek medical advice from a Dietitian, an Endocrinologist or GP. If symptoms are severe and you are unable to tolerate solid food, fluids are encouraged as they are more easily digested.

- For severe nausea and vomiting, aim to keep hydrated with regular sips of water and consider a small amount of broth (made from stock cubes) or sports drinks every hour to avoid dehydration
- Try to avoid highly sweetened drinks
- Certain medications may be prescribed by your doctor to assist with the emptying of your stomach and improve nausea and vomiting.

If your appetite remains poor and you are losing weight, oral supplements can be prescribed by a Dietitian.

## References

Evidenced based nutrition guidelines for the prevention and management of diabetes, Diabetes UK, March 2018.

Clinical Guideline: Management of Gastroparesis, Camilleri, M. The American Journal of Gastroenterology, 2013

**Acknowledgements:** Northern Adelaide Local Health Network Dietitians

The information in this fact sheet should only be used following consultation with a Dietitian.

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## For more information

### CALHN Diabetes Education Service

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