

Gastroparesis is a condition that greatly reduces, or in some cases completely eliminates, the ability of the stomach to properly digest food and move it through the digestive tract. When functioning normally, the muscles of the stomach frequently contract to crush food and push it to the next stage of digestion. With gastroparesis however, the stomach is not able to produce contractions strong enough to move food along into the small bowel.

Causes

Gastroparesis is caused when nerve signals to the stomach are disrupted. This disruption can be caused by numerous conditions including from diabetes, autoimmune conditions, cancers and cancer treatments, or when the nerve controlling stomach contractions, the vagus nerve, is damaged through surgery. In some cases, medications, such as narcotic pain killers, can cause symptoms similar to gastroparesis. However, most cases of gastroparesis have no identifiable cause.

Symptoms

The most common symptom of gastroparesis is feeling full shortly after starting a meal. Other symptoms include bloating, vomiting, nausea, heartburn and weight loss or malnutrition.

Diagnosis

There are several methods to diagnose gastroparesis. An upper GI endoscopy, or EGD, allows the physician to use a thin, flexible tube with a camera to see the patient's throat and stomach to check for abnormalities. Additionally, a gastric emptying study may be used to measure how long it takes the stomach to empty its contents. This test involves consuming a small meal containing a tracer material that can be monitored by the physician to track the rate at which food leaves the stomach.

Treatment

Diet is an important part of treating gastroparesis. Modifying dietary habits can ensure you receive the necessary calories and nutrients to stay healthy while also avoiding unnecessary stress to the digestive system. For example, eating smaller meals more frequently and reducing the amount of hard to digest foods like fatty and fibrous foods will help ease digestion and avoid complications resulting from gastroparesis. For more information about what to eat with gastroparesis, see our diet page [here](#).

Beyond diet, there are medications available to assist the stomach with digestion. These medications include erythromycin and metoclopramide, which can cause the stomach to contract and force food along the digestive tract.

In cases where a modified diet is not providing adequate nutrition, a feeding tube may become necessary. In severe cases, surgery may be considered to bypass the lower part of the stomach to assist it in emptying its contents.

For individuals with gastroparesis caused by an underlying condition such as diabetes, treatment begins with managing that condition before looking at dietary changes or medications.