

Diabetes: Gastroparesis



After you eat, your stomach normally should empty after 1½ to 2 hours. When you have gastroparesis, your stomach takes a lot longer to empty. This can cause belly pain, bloating, belching, hiccups, heartburn, nausea or vomiting, loss of appetite, and other problems. These symptoms may come and go. They most often occur during and after meals. With gastroparesis, you may feel full after only a few bites of food. Home treatment can often help with gastroparesis.

Bezoar is a fairly rare condition related to gastroparesis. In this condition, food stays in the stomach for a long time and forms a hard lump. This causes food to get stuck in the stomach.

What causes gastroparesis?

Gastroparesis occurs when the nerves to the stomach do not work properly. Diabetes is the most common cause of this nerve damage. When you have gastroparesis, food can remain in your stomach for a long time. When food finally enters the intestine and is absorbed, your blood sugar levels rise. When you have gastroparesis, you cannot predict when your stomach will empty. This can make it harder to control your blood sugar levels. Although it can be hard, keeping your blood sugar levels under control may help with your symptoms.

With gastroparesis, you may need to take your insulin or medicines after you eat, when your blood sugar starts to rise. This may help you prevent hypoglycemia.

What can you do at home?

- Eat several small meals each day rather than three large meals.
- Eat foods that are low in fiber and fat.
- If your doctor suggests it, take medicines that help the stomach empty more quickly. These are called motility agents.
- Carefully monitor your blood sugar. Controlling blood sugar levels may decrease your symptoms.

When should you call your doctor?

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have severe belly pain, or you have belly pain that lasts longer than 24 hours and is not getting better.
- Your digestive problems get worse or occur more often.
- You have trouble controlling your blood sugar levels.
- You have trouble swallowing, or food sticks on the way down.
- You have had constipation for more than a week, even though you've tried home treatment.
- You have any new symptoms.
- You have any problems with your medicine.
- You have questions or concerns.