

## Gastroparesis Diet Tips

### Introduction

*Gastroparesis* means “stomach (*gastro*) paralysis (*paresis*).” In gastroparesis, your stomach empties too slowly. Gastroparesis can have many causes, so symptoms range from mild (but annoying) to severe, and week-to-week or even day-to-day.

This handout is designed to give some suggestions for diet changes in the hope that symptoms will improve or even stop. Very few research studies have been done to guide us as to which foods are better tolerated by patients with gastroparesis. The suggestions are mostly based on experience and our understanding of how the stomach and different foods normally empty. Anyone with gastroparesis should see a doctor and a Registered Dietitian for advice on how to maximize their nutritional status.

### The Basics

#### *Volume*

The larger the meal, the slower the stomach will empty. It is important to decrease the amount of food eaten at a meal, so you will have to eat more often. Smaller meals more often (6-8 or more if needed) may allow you to eat enough.

#### *Liquids versus Solids*

If decreasing the meal size and increasing the number of “meals” does not work, the next step is to switch to more liquid-type foods. Liquids empty the stomach more easily than solids do. Pureed foods may be better also.

## *Fiber*

Fiber (found in many fruits, vegetables, and grains) may slow stomach emptying and fill the stomach up too fast. This won't leave room for foods that may be easier tolerated. A *bezoar* is a mixture of food fibers that may get stuck in the stomach and not empty well, like a hairball in a cat. For patients who have had a bezoar, a fiber restriction is important. This includes avoiding over-the-counter fiber/bulking medicines like Metamucil® and others.

## *Fat*

Fat may slow stomach emptying in some patients, but many can easily consume fat in beverages. Our experience is that fat in liquid forms like whole milk, milkshakes, nutritional supplements, etc. is often well tolerated. Unless a fat-containing food or fluid clearly causes worse symptoms, fat should not be limited. This is because people with gastroparesis often need all the calories they can get, since eating enough may be very hard to do. Liquid fat is often well tolerated, pleasurable, and it provides a great source of calories in smaller amounts.

## *Medications*

There are quite a few medications that can slow stomach emptying. Ask your doctor if any of the medicines you are on could be slowing down your stomach emptying.

## **Getting Started**

- Set a goal weight you want to meet.
- Avoid large meals.
- Eat enough to meet your goal weight. It may be 4-8 smaller meals and snacks.
- Avoid solid foods that are high in fat and avoid adding too much fat to foods. High fat drinks are usually ok – try them and see.
- Eat nutritious foods first before filling up on “empty calories” like candy, cakes, sodas, etc.
- Chew foods well, especially meats. Meats may be easier to eat if ground or puréed.
- Avoid high fiber foods because they may be harder for your stomach to empty.

- Sit up while eating and stay upright for at least 1 hour after you finish. Try taking a nice walk after meals.
- If you have diabetes, keep your blood sugar under control. Let your doctor know if your blood sugar runs >200 mg/dL on a regular basis.

## Getting your Calories

When getting enough calories is a daily struggle, make everything you eat and drink count:

- Take medications with calorie-containing beverages like milk, juice, and sweet tea instead of water or diet drinks.
- High calorie drinks are better than water because they provide calories and fluid. Use peach, pear, or papaya nectar, fruit juices and drinks, Hawaiian Punch<sup>®</sup>, Hi C<sup>®</sup>, lemonade, Kool-Aid<sup>®</sup>, sweet tea, or even soda.
- Fortify milk by adding dry milk powder: add 1 cup powdered milk to 1 quart milk.
- Drink whole milk if tolerated instead of skim or 2%. Use whole, condensed, or evaporated milk when preparing cream-based soups, custards, puddings, and hot cereals, smoothies, milkshakes, etc.
- Add Carnation Instant Breakfast, protein powder, dry milk powder, or other flavored powders or flavored syrups to whole milk or juices.
- Make custards and puddings with eggs or egg substitutes like Eggbeaters<sup>®</sup>.
- Try adding ice cream, sherbet, and sorbet to ready-made supplements such as Nutra-shakes<sup>®</sup>, Ensure<sup>®</sup> or Boost<sup>®</sup>. Peanut butter, chocolate syrup, or caramel sauce is also great in these.

## What to Eat

<p><b>Starches</b></p>	<p><b>Breads:</b> white bread and “light” whole wheat bread (no nuts, seeds, etc.), including French/Italian, bagels, English muffin, plain roll, pita bread, tortilla (flour or corn), pancake, waffle, naan, flat bread</p> <p><b>Cereals:</b> quick/instant oats, grits, Cream of Wheat, cream of rice, puffed wheat and rice cereals such as Cheerios<sup>®</sup>, Sugar Pops<sup>®</sup>, Kix<sup>®</sup>, Rice Krispies<sup>®</sup>, Fruit Loops<sup>®</sup>, Special K<sup>®</sup>, Cocoa Crispies<sup>®</sup></p>
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	<p><b>Grains/Potatoes:</b> rice (plain), pasta, macaroni (plain), bulgur wheat (couscous), barley, sweet and white potatoes (no skin, plain), yams, french fries (baked)</p> <p><b>Crackers/Chips:</b> arrowroot, breadsticks, matzo, melba toast, oyster, pretzels, saltines, soda, zwieback, water crackers, baked potato chips, pretzels</p>
<b>Meats, fish, poultry, other proteins (ground or pureed)</b>	<p><b>Beef:</b> chipped beef, flank steak, tenderloin, skirt steak, round (bottom or top), rump</p> <p><b>Veal:</b> leg, loin, rib, shank, shoulder</p> <p><b>Pork:</b> lean pork, tenderloin, pork chops, ham</p> <p><b>Poultry (skinless):</b> chicken, turkey</p> <p><b>Wild game (skinless):</b> venison, rabbit, squirrel, pheasant, duck, goose</p> <p><b>Fish/shellfish (fresh or frozen, plain, no breading):</b> crab, lobster, shrimp, clams, scallops, oysters, tuna (in water)</p> <p><b>Cheese:</b> cottage cheese, grated parmesan</p> <p><b>Other:</b> eggs (no creamed or fried), egg white, egg substitute tofu, strained baby meats (all)</p>
<b>Vegetables (cooked, and if necessary, blenderized/strained)</b>	Beets, tomato sauce, tomato juice, tomato paste or purée, carrots, strained baby vegetables (all), mushrooms, vegetable juice
<b>Fruits and juices (cooked and, if necessary, blenderized/strained)</b>	Fruits, applesauce, banana, peaches (canned), pears (canned), strained baby fruits (all), juices (all), fruit drinks, fruit flavored beverages
<b>Milk products</b>	Milk – any as tolerated: chocolate, buttermilk, yogurt (without fruit pieces), frozen yogurt, kefir (liquid yogurt), evaporated milk, condensed milk, milk powder, custard/pudding

<b>Soups</b>	Broth, bouillon, strained creamed soups (with milk or water)
<b>Beverages</b>	Hot cocoa (made with water or milk), Kool-Aid <sup>®</sup> , lemonade, Tang <sup>®</sup> and similar powdered products, Gatorade <sup>®</sup> or Powerade <sup>®</sup> , soft drinks, coffee/ coffee drinks, tea/chai
<b>Seasonings/gravies</b>	Cranberry sauce (smooth), fat-free gravies, Butter Buds <sup>®</sup> , mustard, ketchup, vegetable oil spray, soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, Tabasco <sup>®</sup> sauce, vanilla and other flavoring extracts, vinegar
<b>Desserts/sweets</b>	Angel food cake, animal crackers, gelatin, ginger snaps, graham crackers, popsicles, plain sherbet, vanilla wafers, gum, gum drops, hard candy, jelly beans, lemon drops, marshmallows, seedless jams and jellies

## What Not to Eat

The following foods have been associated with bezoar formation and may need to be avoided (see Fiber section on page 1): apples, berries, coconut, figs, oranges, persimmons, Brussels sprouts, green beans, legumes, potato peels, sauerkraut.

## When Solids Do Not Seem to Be Working – Try Blenderized Food

Any food can be blenderized, but solid foods will need to be thinned down with some type of liquid.

- If you do not have a blender, strained baby foods will work and can be thinned down as needed with milk, soy or rice milk, water, broth, etc.
- Always clean the blender well. Any food left in the blender for more than 1-2 hours could cause food poisoning.
- **Meats, fish, poultry and ham:** Blend with broths, water, milk, vegetable or V-8<sup>®</sup> juice, tomato sauce, gravies.
- **Vegetables:** Blend with water, tomato juice, broth, strained baby vegetables.

- **Starches:** Blend potatoes, pasta, or rice with soups, broth, milk, water, gravies. Add strained baby meats, etc. to add protein if needed. Consider using hot cereals such as Cream of Wheat or rice, grits, etc. as your “starch” at lunch and dinner.
- **Fruits:** Blend with their own juices, other fruit juices, water, strained baby fruits.
- **Cereals:** Make with caloric beverage instead of water. Try whole milk (or even evaporated/condensed milk), soy or rice milk, juice, Ensure<sup>®</sup>, Boost<sup>®</sup> or store brand equivalent. Add sugars, honey, molasses, syrups, or other flavorings, butter or vegetable oil for extra calories.
- **Mixed dishes:** Lasagna, macaroni and cheese, spaghetti, chili, chop suey – add adequate liquid of your choice, blend well and strain.

## Resources

- University of Virginia Health System, Digestive Health Center website: [www.GInutrition.virginia.edu](http://www.GInutrition.virginia.edu)
  - Patient education Materials: Gastroparesis Long version
  - Nutrition Articles, choose to browse by topic and scroll down to gastroparesis: Parrish CR, McCray S. Gastroparesis & Nutrition: The Art. Practical Gastroenterology 2011;XXXV(9):26. Parrish CR, Yoshida C. Nutrition Intervention for the Patient with Gastroparesis: An Update. Practical Gastroenterology 2005;XXIX(8):29.
- Association of Gastrointestinal Motility Disorders, Inc. (AGMD) [www.agmd-gimotility.org](http://www.agmd-gimotility.org)
- Gastroparesis Dysmotility Association: [www.digestivedistress.com](http://www.digestivedistress.com)