Oxford University Hospitals
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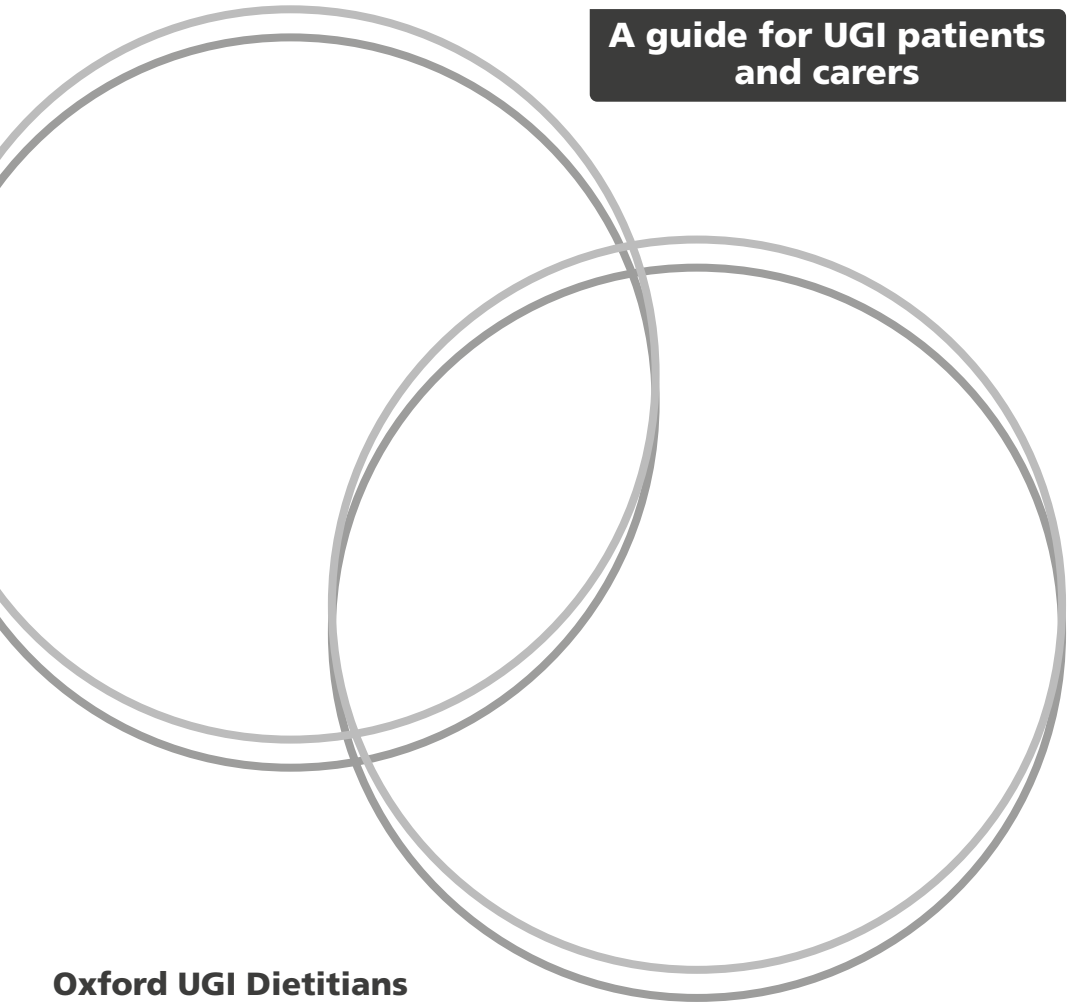
# Dumping Syndrome following Oesophageal or Gastric Surgery

**A guide for UGI patients and carers**



**Oxford UGI Dietitians**
Oxford UGIC, Churchill Hospital

# What is Dumping Syndrome?

Dumping Syndrome is the name given to a collection of symptoms which may occur following surgery to remove the stomach or oesophagus.

The stomach usually acts as a reservoir to store food, allowing it to mix with digestive juices where it is broken down into smaller pieces. The digested food then moves into the small bowel where it is absorbed. After surgery, where the stomach capacity is smaller, undigested food can pass too quickly into the bowel, which can make you feel unwell and give symptoms known as dumping syndrome.

# What are the symptoms?

The symptoms vary from person to person and may include one or more of the following:

- Nausea
- Bloating
- Abdominal cramps
- Diarrhoea
- Sweating
- Shaking
- Dizziness
- Palpitations
- Feeling of weakness

There are two types of dumping syndrome. In early dumping syndrome, the symptoms occur within 30 minutes of eating. In late dumping syndrome, they can occur from 1 to 3 hours after eating.

# Early dumping

Symptoms can occur within 30 minutes of eating. This is due to a large amount of undigested food moving too quickly into the bowel from the stomach, stomach tube or oesophagus; i.e 'dumping' it into the small bowel.

# Late dumping

Late dumping occurs 1-3 hours after eating. This happens when the food delivered into the bowel is absorbed quickly causing the body to release insulin. Insulin is a hormone that causes blood sugar levels to fall, however following surgery, too much insulin may be released resulting in a low blood sugar level. This is because insulin is also 'dumped' quicker than usual into the blood stream in response to the food in the small bowel.

A low blood sugar level may make you feel very tired, weak and in need of rest and a lie down. You may feel lightheaded and suddenly feel hungry.

# What is the treatment for Dumping Syndrome?

Symptoms will usually resolve with time, as your body adapts to your surgery. This may take several months and often up to and beyond a year. In the meantime, symptoms can be prevented or reduced with dietary changes.

# Dietary changes to help with Dumping Syndrome

Initially, it is recommended that you keep a food diary for a few days to help identify the cause of dumping. It may be caused by the amount of food that you are eating, how quickly you are eating, what you are eating or a combination of all of these factors.

It is recommended that you try to follow 5 steps to help prevent Dumping Syndrome.

# 5 steps to help prevent Dumping Syndrome

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|---|---|
| 1 | **Eat small and frequent meals and snacks** |
| 2 | **Eat slowly and chew food well** |
| 3 | **Eat protein with all meals and snacks** |
| 4 | **Avoid eating and drinking at the same time** |
| 5 | **Limit consumption of sweet food and drinks** |

## 1 Eat small, frequent meals and snacks:

- Portion sizes will need to be reduced. Smaller portions help your body deal with the food more easily, so you will be able to absorb more of it.
- If meal or snack portions are too large, the food is more likely to pass into the bowl undigested.
- You may find it useful to use a tea plate or dessert plate to help control portion size.
- Eating more frequently is important to ensure you stay well-nourished and still eat the same amount of food overall. This will help you to minimise muscle loss and weight loss.

## 2 Eat slowly and chew food well:

- Chewing food well will aid digestion by breaking the food down in the mouth. It will reduce the likelihood of undigested food particles passing quickly into the bowel.
- If you have had your stomach removed or reduced in size, you will need to chew food well to help replicate the usual churning action of the stomach.

## 3 Ensure protein is eaten with all meals:

- Protein foods will help to slow the passage of food from the stomach into the small bowel.
- Protein is important for wound healing, recovery from surgery and maintaining muscle mass.
- Protein foods include meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy foods and non-dairy alternatives such as pulses, nuts and seeds. They should form the main part of the meal. Ensure they are eaten as the correct texture always refer to the post-surgery dietary information for suitable food textures.

## 4 Do not eat and drink at the same time:

- Avoid fluids or limit to very small sips of fluids for 15-30 minutes before a meal or snack and 30 minutes after.
- Drinking with a meal or snack will increase the volume of food and fluid in your digestive system and can cause rapid movement into the bowel.

## 5 Limit consumption of sweet food and drinks:

- Do not add sugar to food or drinks; try using a sweetener instead.
- Foods such as cakes, biscuits, chocolate and sweet desserts and puddings will contain sugar. You don't have to avoid these foods completely but be aware that they may cause dumping. If you notice any dumping symptoms, use a food diary to record them, and try to establish what could be causing the dumping syndrome.

- You may be able to tolerate a small portion, or you may have to limit this type of food for a few months.
- Aim to avoid drinking sugary drinks, fruit juice or Lucozade. These provide little nutritional value. Aim to use a no-added sugar squash or cordial if this is your preferred drink.
- Simple sugars in jam and marmalade may cause dumping syndrome. Choose a preserve that is high in fruit and low in sugar i.e. more fruit than sugar on the ingredients list. Eat in small amounts on wholemeal or brown toast rather than white bread.

# Dairy foods and Dumping Syndrome

It is not common for milk or milk products to cause dumping. If you do feel that you experience dumping symptoms with milk or milk products, it is worth considering other ingredients that may be contributing.

For example, yoghurts may have sugar added for sweetness. Low fat yoghurts, ready-made custard and ice-cream are often sweetened with extra sugar and may cause dumping for this reason.

- Try to avoid low fat milky desserts which have sugar added.
- Full fat options will provide more energy and are less likely to cause dumping.

If milk does seem to cause your symptoms, try changing to semi skimmed or skimmed milk rather than cutting out milk completely.

If you do change to non-milk dairy products, ensure they are fortified with calcium and look for those with the most protein such as soya milk or lactose free milk. For example, oat milk can be very low in calories and protein so it not always a good alternative following surgery.

# Other ways to help manage Dumping Syndrome:

If you do not find an improvement in your symptoms with these changes, consider the following points:

- **Lie down for 20-40 minutes following a meal** – this will help slow down the emptying of the stomach, stomach tube or oroesophagus.
- **Avoid very refined cereal products** such as white bread and rolls, cornflakes or sweetened cereals, shop bought cakes and pastries.
- **Limit intake of caffeine** – this can stimulate the bowel further, e.g. fresh coffee, large quantities of instant coffee, tea, fizzy drinks containing caffeine such as cola. Low caffeine or caffeine free tea and coffee can be good alternative and will help to keep you well hydrated.
- When serving casseroles or stews, use a slotted spoon to drain away additional liquid. This will help to reduce the volume of the meal and ensure you still have plenty of the main ingredients.

# Medication for dumping syndrome

If your symptoms are very severe and do not respond to dietary changes, you may be prescribed a medication called Loperamide (Imodium). This will slow the time it takes food to pass through your digestive system. This should be taken 30 minutes to one hour before eating. The dose can usually be varied to help control symptoms on the advice of your GP.

Diarrhoea or stools that are loose are not the only symptoms of dumping syndrome. Do consider dumping if you do not feel well after eating or feel bloated or have flushing or sweating after a meal or snack. If you feel you have diarrhoea that is not explained by dumping syndrome-either by accompanying symptoms or related to what you have eaten, please consult your GP.

**Specialist UGI Dietitians:** Churchill Hospital, Oxford
Contact: **01865 228305**

## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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