

Gastric emptying study

This fact sheet tells you what a gastric emptying study is, and what is involved. Please read this sheet before having your procedure. If you have any questions, ask your doctor.

What is a gastric emptying study?

A gastric emptying study is a nuclear medicine procedure. It uses radioactive material to measure the speed at which food empties from your stomach and enters into your small intestine.

Gastric emptying studies are used to check whether your stomach is emptying as it should. The symptoms of slow emptying include nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and abdominal fullness after eating. The symptoms of fast emptying include diarrhoea, weakness or light-headedness after eating.

What is involved?

You will be given instructions on how to prepare for your procedure. Usually, you will need to fast (stop eating and drinking) and check about taking medicines with your doctor.

Before the procedure, you should tell your doctor and the imaging staff if you have any allergies (especially to eggs), are pregnant, think you might be pregnant or are breastfeeding.

There are two types of gastric emptying studies.

- Solid – you will eat a small meal, often eggs.
- Liquid – you will have a drink that contains a small amount of radioactive material.

If you are having a solid study, you will need to stand to have images taken of your stomach area for two minutes, every hour, for four hours.

If you are having a liquid study, you will need to lie on your back while images are taken of your stomach area for one hour.

During the test, you can't eat or drink anything else.

What happens after the procedure?

A nuclear medicine physician (a specialist doctor) will assess the images and then give the results to your referring doctor. You should not have any issues after the scan.

Are there any risks?

While all nuclear medicine tests involve some exposure to radiation, the amount is very small, so the risk of side effects is very low. Allergic reactions are very rare and almost always mild.

For more information

Nuclear medicine: Answering your questions by the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation: www.ansto.gov.au/cs/groups/corporate/documents/webcontent/mdaw/mdax/~edisp/acstest_038604.pdf

MedicineNet.com: www.medicinenet.com/gastric_emptying_study/article.htm

The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency: www.arpsansa.gov.au

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