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Gastroparesis is a condition that hinders the emptying of the stomach of its contents. It is caused by paralysis of a part of the stomach muscles. When the muscles stop functioning the churning of the food in the stomach is stopped and it not only is not processed, but it also stays in the stomach for a longer period. It can occur in people suffering from type 1 and type 2 diabetes; however it is more common in patients suffering from type 1, especially those people who are not able to control the level of glucose in the blood. A normal person eats food when he is hungry and once he has eaten and his hunger pangs are satisfied, he just forgets about it and goes about his normal business. He is not interested or bothered about what is happening to the food in his stomach. It is just fine with a normal, healthy person. However for people who have chronic diabetes to live with, the story is more complicated.

The effort is to make life a lot less complicated by proper medication and diet. In the normal course, muscular contractions force food from the stomach to the intestines in peristaltic waves during the process of digestion. These contractions are controlled by the vagus nerve. This nerve, which plays a crucial role in digesting food, can get damaged, particularly in diabetics when the blood glucose levels remain high for a prolonged period of time. The most common symptoms would be a sense of Nausea sometimes leading to vomiting of ingested but undigested food, a sense of fullness just midway through a meal, heartburns while eating. Some people may experience a temporary bloating of the abdomen with a sense of pain in the upper parts. Another important symptom would be sudden change in the blood glucose levels and lack of appetite and a sense of lethargy. Abdominal cramps and painful spasms are also typical symptoms which can increase due to consumption of spicy and oily/fatty foods and carbonated drinks.

The complications arising from this condition are general malnutrition, chronic fatigue and weight loss leading to a general sense of lethargy and disinterest in normal day to day tasks. This is due to the poor calorie intake as food is eaten but no nutrients are absorbed by the system. Since the food remains in the stomach for a long period of time, fermentation takes place and encourages bacterial infection. Intestinal obstructions are common due to solid masses of undigested food being trapped. Finally the most dangerous complication would be the fluctuation in the blood glucose levels due to the delayed and unpredictable gastric emptying.

Evaluation and of gastrointestinal symptoms in diabetics is paramount in order to rule out Gastroparesis. The primary concern and goal of treatment would be in maintaining the blood glucose levels within normal parameters. This can be achieved by intake of appropriate dosage of diabetic medication, strict monitoring of food intake, combined with effective antiemetic (preventing nausea/vomiting) and pro-kinetic (enhancing the gastrointestinal contractions) treatment methods.

Dietary modifications like eating smaller but frequent meals as against a large multi-course meal would be beneficial. Spicy and fatty/oily foods should be avoided completely. Abstinence from alcohol, tobacco and beverages like coffee and tea is very important. A disciplined regimen of exercising or even brisk walking or jogging would go a long way in gaining relief from most complications that a diabetic faces day in and day out. For severe and persistent cases, therapeutic endoscopy could be beneficial. It is best not to deviate from the prescribed medicines which should be taken at the right time without fail.

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