

Digestion Takes Time and Energy

Many people with eating issues believe that food turns into body fat almost immediately. This is simply not true, and a basic understanding of digestion may help. Every time food passes your lips, it marks the beginning of an incredible journey...

Your Tastebuds

The moment food hits your tongue, your tastebuds come alive. As nerve endings, they're responsible for sussing out the chemicals in the food you've eaten and transmitting messages to your brain. Without them, you wouldn't be able to experience those salty, bitter, sweet or sour sensations.

Did you know...?

You have roughly 10,000 tastebuds on your tongue.

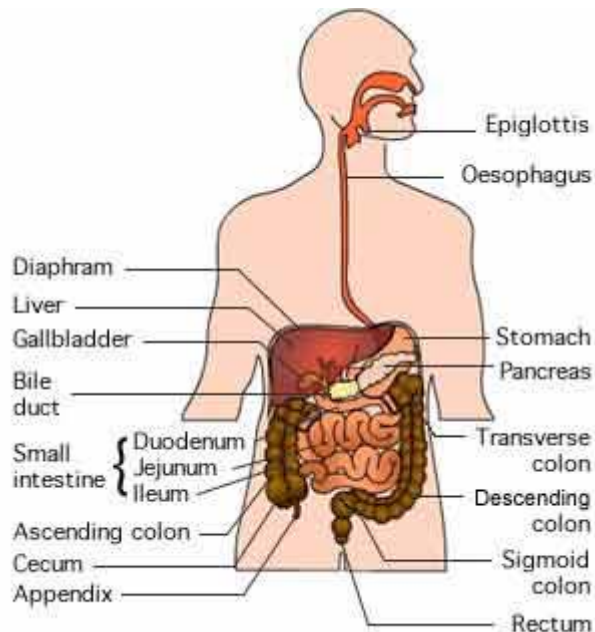
While your tastebuds are busy at work, your teeth grind the food down into easily digestible pieces and your saliva moistens everything up, so that it doesn't scrape your digestive (gastrointestinal) tract on the way down.

Stomach

Once you've swallowed your food, it's carried down the esophagus to your stomach. Here, your stomach walls churn the food up to make sure that it's mixed with your acidic digestive juices. By the time your tummy has finished, the food is a creamy mixture called chyme (pronounced kime). Once it's liquefied, it can be squirted through a small hole into your small intestine.

Did you know...?

The acids in your stomach are so strong, they kill bacteria and are similar to those used in industry as metal cleaner.



Small Intestine

This is where most of the nutrient-digesting action happens. To help your small intestine cope with the acidity of the chyme, your pancreas releases an alkaline and lots of enzymes, which break down the food's carbohydrates, fat and protein. Meanwhile, your gall bladder donates some bile, to ensure that any fat is melted down thoroughly.

Did you know...?

The average digestive tract is roughly the length of a double-decker bus.

Once the food is reduced to tiny particles, it's absorbed through the walls of your small intestine and the nutrients are carried into your bloodstream.

Large Intestine

Any nutrients that can't be digested end up here. Fibre is a nutrient with certain components that can't be absorbed by the human body. Your large intestine begins at the colon, where some of the remaining nutrients can be mopped up. After this point, anything that's left over is waste matter and is stored in the rectum, waiting for the journey's end.

Did you know...?

An average stool is 75% water. The remainder is made up of fibre, dead cells and bacteria.

Dietitian's Comments

This journey through the body can take anywhere from 24 hours to two weeks, but the average is two to three days. So, when you're feeling fatter after a meal you've just eaten, consider that digestion takes awhile, and that you have not gained any body weight because of the meal.

When you realize how the stomach holds food to prepare it for digestion, and how long the "processing factory" (the intestine) is, you might be able to have some compassion for yourself. Of course the abdominal area will be just slightly distended after a meal.

Be careful though, most people with eating issues have an extremely exaggerated view of the size of the abdomen after a meal. This distension is usually no more than 1/8 of an inch, possibly 1/2 inch at the very most after a large meal.

Feeling fat is never about the size of your body. So, as always, when you feel fat, decode that to "I feel uncomfortable," and then explore why is it you feel comfortable. If you say you feel comfortable because your too fat, consider that you are feeling uncomfortable because you are making a judgment about yourself, not because you are a certain size. That's hard to believe, but it's absolutely true!