



# **G**astroparesis & **D**ysmotilities **A**ssociation

GPDA [www.digestedistress.com](http://www.digestedistress.com)

**GPDA:**

## **Gastroparesis**

### **Tips for Living, & Coping**

"Take Life...One Small Bite  
At a Time"

**GPDA:**

**GPDA-USA**

We are a North American based  
Non-profit association

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## **Hello, my name is Nan....**

I have idiopathic gastroparesis (aka GP). I am probably like you in that I had never heard of this digestive disease that is, until it hit my life. Yet, my symptoms are typical of those experienced by others who suffer from this stomach problem. These symptoms include:

- Nausea,
- Vomiting,
- Regurgitation of food,
- Heartburn,
- Bloating,
- Gas, and
- Change in weight.

Even the name of our illness is difficult. Some people, upon hearing the name for the first time, will say, "Gastro, what?". But breaking down the words makes things easier to understand: gastro = stomach and paresis = weakness. Gastroparesis, then, means a poorly working stomach.

Those of us who suffer from GP come from all walks of life but most of us are women. Some of us are children; some of us are elderly.

GP can impact all of us in unique ways. Some of us can keep down solid food while others vomit it back up. Some of us can only tolerate liquids while there are those of us who are able to handle liquids one day and not the next. It is this unpredictability of our stomachs that, at times, can be frustrating, and at other times can be quite frightening.

Inevitably, we have to learn by trial and error what works and doesn't work for our bodies.

Those of us who have been at this for awhile have accumulated some collective wisdom to share in hopes that it will help guide you on your path to better symptom and life management as you wrestle with this very challenging digestive disease.

On my path, some of the greatest people I've been privileged to meet are fellow GP sufferers. It is no coincidence that the word "greatest" contains the word "test", for people with GP are certainly tested by each day's struggle against digestive symptoms. Still, these

wonderful folks, despite feeling bad themselves, have shown me how to live and have helped me to understand that I am not alone.

It is my hope that you will find these tips assembled here useful and that you will pass them along to someone else as we extend this chain of support.

Your GP friend,  
Nan



## **Practical Tips for Handling GP**

"Take Life...One Small Bite at a Time"


- Listen to your body! Fatigue will settle in as you struggle against symptoms. Take frequent rest breaks but continue to make an effort even if it just means getting up to change your PJs or moving from the bed to a chair.
- Seek out help from others. Create a support team to keep you going mentally, physically, emotionally, financially, and spiritually.
- Save money you won't know when you'll need it. Having a little money in the bank will give you a wonderful sense of freedom and self-reliance.
- For easy reference, keep in your wallet a list of current medications and their dosages.
- Don't take this disease personally. Pretend you're in an 8th grade Science class your body has gone haywire. Keep a log of your body's reactions, symptoms, food intake, etc. This will be a big help to your doctor.
- Depression is a very real danger with this disease as it is with any chronic illness. Constant symptoms that disrupt sleep, eating, and social plans can leave you emotionally fragile. Take action watch funny movies or TV shows. Laughter is the best medicine. You may also want to seek out the services of a good psychologist to help you learn some skills of

## Resources for GP Sufferers & Their Caregivers


of relaxation and guided imagery.


- If you are still able to work, check with your Human Resources (HR) department to see if they have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to help you manage.
- We must accept responsibility for our bodies and take care of them.
- It's okay to be afraid, especially of food. Remember, take it slowly. Eat as much as you can and whatever kind of calories you can get down.
- Talk to your insurance company to see if they will cover the cost of speaking to a nutritionist. These visits should be covered if your GP is directly impacting your nutritional intake. As well, information on diets can be found on the GPDA web site.
- Be realistic about what to expect from your body. Bouts of symptom flare-ups will come and go. They are not necessarily tied to anything you did or did not do. So don't feel guilty.
- Simplify as much as possible you deserve it!

### Here are some of my favorite books:

 *The Chronic Illness Experience* by Cherie Register

 *The Art of Getting Well* by Martin Rossman

 *Delicate Balance: Living with a Chronic Illness* by Susan M. Wells

 *Strategies, Shortcuts, and Sanity for Moms Battling Illness* by Kristine

Make sure you have access to the Internet so you can log onto the following web sites. If you don't have a computer don't worry! Your local library can provide you with free access to the Internet.

Yahoo.com provides a number of on-line support groups offering information and support. Some of these groups even arrange for local area meetings. Support groups for parents of children with GP, teenagers, young adults, and general sites are listed at:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/search?query=gastroparesis>

The National Institutes of Health also offers "fact sheets" on gastroparesis. You can find these by visiting:

<http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/gastroparesis/>

GPDA offers an on-line forum, no registration required. Also available are on-line patient educational pamphlets, comprehensive diet information, and information on accessing medications, treatments, and physicians. Please see:

[www.digestivedistress.com](http://www.digestivedistress.com)

### How to Cope with Others around You

As sick as you feel, some of the toughest aspects of your illness are dealing with all the questions, impatience, indifference, and quizzical looks from others.

Part of the problem is that you may still look "healthy". Some people may even express envy over your new, slimmed-down appearance. Even those closest to you may not react to your illness as you expected.

You are still who you are, but faced with the added challenge of learning to manage your emotions and your symptoms.

Once you recover from the initial shock of finding that you have gastroparesis, realize it takes time to adjust. Permit

yourself that time and realize too that emotions can well up unexpectedly leaving you feeling overwhelmed. During these moments, you need help from others or even a professional. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

When you feel strong enough, realize it is time to get down to navigating your feelings.

This is a task that you must consciously take on. Ultimately you will be surprised to find new allies from those you never expected and may lose alliances that you thought were strong and secure. You are in charge of your emotions. You are not responsible for others who don't understand or support you. Your new job now is to be kind to yourself. Give permission to yourself to experience moments of sadness; then pick up your feelings and get going again.

Humor is your best defense. Finding other sources of strength through meditation or prayer may help you to focus on your important, new tasks.

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