

Digestion

Body & health

The route food takes, how long each stage lasts, and what happens there.

A journey of about nine metres, taking roughly one to three days end to end.

1

Mouth — 1 minute

Chewing breaks food up; saliva starts on the starches.

2

Oesophagus — 10 seconds

Muscular waves push food down. Gravity is not required.

3

Stomach — 2 to 4 hours

Acid and enzymes break down protein; food becomes a liquid called chyme.

4

Small intestine — 3 to 6 hours

Where nearly all nutrients are absorbed, through villi that give it a huge surface area.

5

Large intestine — 12 to 48 hours

Water is reclaimed; gut bacteria ferment what is left.

HELPERS, NOT PART OF THE TUBE

Liver — makes bile, processes everything absorbed

Gallbladder — stores bile, releases it for fats

Pancreas — enzymes for all three food groups, plus insulin

The small intestine is longer than the large one. It is named for its diameter, not its length.