



What Happens to Food When You Swallow It

KS4 BIOLOGY

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Your Food's Amazing Journey

When you swallow, you're not just dropping food into a dark hole! Your food is actually starting an incredible journey through your **digestive system** — a long tube that runs from your mouth all the way through your body. This journey takes about **24 to 72 hours**, and during that time, your body does some brilliant work to turn that pizza, apple, or sandwich into energy and nutrients.

Think of it like a factory assembly line where food gets processed at each stage, getting smaller and more useful as it travels along.

Breaking Down Begins in Your Mouth

The moment you start chewing, your **saliva** (spit) gets to work! Your spit contains chemicals called **enzymes** that start breaking down your food into smaller pieces. Your teeth also help by cutting and crushing the food into manageable chunks.

Down the Oesophagus

When you swallow, muscles in your throat push the food down a tube called the **oesophagus**. This happens automatically — you don't have to think about it! The muscles squeeze in a wave-like motion to push your food downwards toward your stomach.

The Stomach's Powerful Work

Your **stomach** is like a muscular bag that churns and mixes your food with strong **acids** and more enzymes. This turns your food into a soupy mixture called **chyme**. Your stomach does this job for **2 to 4 hours**, depending on what you've eaten.

Think of it like a washing machine tumbling your clothes — your stomach squeezes and mixes to break food down even further.

The Small Intestine Takes Over

Next, your partially digested food moves into the **small intestine**, which is actually very long — about **6 metres**! Here, more enzymes and chemicals from your **pancreas** and **liver** help break down the food completely. The walls of your small intestine are covered in tiny finger-like bumps called **villi** that absorb nutrients into your bloodstream.

The Large Intestine Finishes Up

Whatever your body couldn't use passes into the **large intestine**, where water is absorbed back into your body. This leaves solid waste that becomes **faeces**, which your body eventually gets rid of when you go to the toilet.

So next time you swallow, remember: your digestive system is working hard to give your body the energy and nutrients it needs to grow, think, and play!