



# **STOMACH CONTENTS AS A MEANS OF EVIDENCE**

**Forensic Science**

# BELL-RINGER



# INTRODUCTION

- In most autopsies the contents of the stomach are an important piece of evidence, which can sometimes prove to be the difference between accidental death and foul play.
- We have all seen the television and cinema autopsies played out where the pathologist will empty the contents of the deceased's stomach and will analyze them with a view to establishing what they ate and when they ate it; this despite what you might think is not the stuff of media legend and is actually a very useful tool in the pathologist's arsenal.



# WHAT STOMACH CONTENTS CAN INDICATE

- The process through which food is absorbed into the body can take anything from twenty two hours to two days to complete and within that time food is broken down and reduced to a liquid pulp from which essential proteins are extracted. Given that this process can take such a long time the contents of the stomach - and in particular their condition at the time of autopsy - can help to estimate the time of death.



- Also it can be used to prove if the deceased was perhaps lured into a false sense of security by their assailant by having a meal with them. A good example of this would be if the deceased's stomach contents consisted of some sort of pizza. The pizza would take roughly two hours to digest within the stomach and if the autopsy was performed and showed that the pizza was still in the stomach then it would be safe to assume the deceased died within two hours prior to discovery.



- Stomach contents can also reveal if the deceased was perhaps experimenting with any form of drug or exotic food, which might bring about a state of internal poisoning.
- As a generally accepted rule stomach contents are analyzed for trace elements of poisons or other toxins that might not normally be found in the deceased's system. This is useful if there is a suspicion of drug abuse or poisoning.



- Stomach contents are useful in the identification of a body that might be difficult to identify by conventional methods. For example if a body is discovered that is dressed in a similar manner to a reported missing person, examining the stomach contents can yield surprising results. Let us say that the missing person has an allergy to a particular food item, if this item is to be found among the stomach contents of the deceased then it might be likely that the two are not the same.



- This does sound perhaps a very simple way of proving the identity - or likewise disputing the identity - of the deceased but it can be a very useful tool.
- Also it is worth making note of the fact that not all pathologists use the stomach contents as a means of proving anything; this is perhaps most common in a case where the victim's death has been accidental and has been witnessed by many.





- Obviously in such a scenario there is nothing to be gained by examining the contents of the stomach but more often than not in investigations where cause of death is in doubt the contents of the human stomach may offer up clues and insights that would normally go unnoticed.



# THANKS

- Due at the end of Class:
- A) Bell-Ringer
- B) Journal

