

# Digestion: a Quick Description

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Cattle, being wary of predators, grab grass with their tongues and use their incisors to tear it from the ground. They don't need bottom incisors, so they don't have any. They quickly gulp down the grass in the open pasture, allowing them to run back to safety. Later they burp back up wads of the grass and chew it thoroughly, starting the breakdown process.

You've heard of their four stomachs? Well, actually, these are organs that help digest intake in different ways.

## **The Rumen**

When food passes down the esophagus, it goes into a giant chamber called the rumen. It contains water and microbes that will break down the fibrous grass so it will be more easily digested. When grain enters the rumen, the cow must develop the microbes that digest grain; cattle are not meant to consume anything but forage. When you begin to feed grain, you must introduce it slowly so the rumen can adapt itself. The rumen expands daily to accommodate the water/grass/grain and microbes. In a large breed cow, a full rumen contains twenty gallons of this mixture. As these contents are broken down, a huge amount of methane gas is produced. That's why cows burp.

## **The Reticulum**

Resembling a honeycomb, the reticulum is near the bottom of the rumen. As the rumen contents become liquid, they are strained through the large pores of the reticulum.

## **The Omasum**

The omasum is also called "the book" or "many-pplies." It is a final strainer; the liquid is filtered through through the fine pores.

## **The Abomasum**

The abomasum is considered the true stomach. From here on, digestion is identical to other mammals. Gastric acids in the abomasum break down the liquid totally and send it to the small intestine, where it is distributed into the blood.

Dottie Love is not a medical professional; please consult your vet.

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