

Wind in the tummy: Some of the most common reasons for feeling bloated

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Feeling bloated? It might not be due entirely to overindulging in your favourite foods.

Most people have experienced bloating at some point – that tight feeling at the abdomen, which emits a drum-like echo when tapped lightly with one finger.

Bloating happens to people of all ages, and can be a cause of incessant crying or crankiness among children, who cannot express their discomfort in words.

Basically, bloating happens when there is excessive wind in the stomach.

The question is: how did the wind get there?

Here are some of the most common reasons for a bloated tummy.



With lactose intolerance affecting around 90% of Asians, milk and milk-based food like ice-cream are a likely cause of bloating. - Filepic

Swallowed air

Eating too fast, talking, laughing or drinking water during a meal can make you swallow too much air, which makes you feel bloated afterwards.

That is why it is important to have good eating habits such as chewing slowly, drinking only at the end of a meal, and not talking while eating.

Fortunately, this type of bloating is minor, and the excess wind gets released through burping soon after the meal.

To speed it up, take a walk instead of sitting or lying down. The exercise will help the digestive process and ease the wind out through flatulence later.

Gassy food and drinks

The fizz in carbonated drinks can give you a bloated feeling, causing some people to skip meals after taking one too many cans of soft drinks.

In the long run, poor dietary habits like this can actually lead to malnutrition because all you get are empty calories, minus the essential nutrients your body needs to function well.

Some foods tend to create more wind than others, such as beans, broccoli, corn, cauliflower, cabbage, mushrooms, brussel sprouts, kangkung, onions and wheat products.

These vegetables contain certain sugars, starches and fibre, which are not broken down as easily as others, hence, they are moved to the large intestine where the bacteria can work on them.

The bloatedness usually resolves after they are completely digested.

To know what triggers your gassiness, keep a food diary and record each incident of bloating along with the food taken.

Everyone responds differently to different foods, so what makes you bloated may have no effect on someone else.

Lactose intolerance

Studies show that lactose intolerance is very high in Asia, affecting about 90% of Asians.

Lactose intolerance is a term used to describe difficulty digesting milk and milk-based products, such as cheese, ice cream or yoghurt.

Once ingested, they cause bloating, stomach pain, fatigue and general discomfort until the digestion process is completed.

Some people grow out of lactose intolerance as they grow older and get desensitized over time.

Lactose intolerance is most common among young children as their digestive tract is not fully matured.

Fructose intolerance

Remember that bloated feeling you get every fruit season when you eat more fruit than usual?

The gassiness is caused by the high fructose content in most fruits and certain vegetables, such as asparagus, garlic and leek.

Fructose is a natural fruit sugar and is usually harmless in small amounts.

In excessive amounts, it causes gastrointestinal discomfort such as bloatedness, stomach pain and diarrhoea.

Problems arise today because many processed (or even health) foods such as tomato sauce, dried fruit, fruit juice, yoghurt, jam, tomato paste, and even honey, contain fructose.

Additionally, artificial sweeteners such as sorbitol and xylitol in sugar-free candies convert to fructose during digestion, giving the body more fructose than we can handle.

The solution?

Keep things in moderation. Overeating is always a bad idea, even for nutritious food such as fruits and vegetables!

Hormonal imbalance

That's how most girls know that their menstrual period will be arriving soon – that bloated, sickly feeling in the abdominal area.

A few days before the onset of menstruation, oestrogen levels tend to rise dramatically.

High oestrogen levels lead to water retention, which makes your entire body swell slightly.

It may not be obvious externally, but most girls recognise the signs when their clothes and shoes feel tighter.

The same occurs during the perimenopausal period, when a woman is on the verge of menopause.

The hormonal cycles are erratic and irregular during this period, resulting in bloating, nausea, fatigue and water retention.

Menopause also reduces the production of bile in the liver. Bile helps digestion by acting as a lubricant for stools in the small intestines.

With insufficient bile, stools may encounter difficulty being discharged, leading to constipation and bloating.

The intensity and duration of these symptoms vary from person to person, so what works to relieve one may not work for another.

If the bloating becomes unbearable during menopause, seek a doctor to see if prebiotics, probiotics or hormone replacement therapy can help.

Stress

Surprise, surprise, prolonged stress and anxiety can make you feel bloated too!

What happens is that the body releases a hormone called cortisol when under duress.

Cortisol creates all kinds of havoc in the body, one of which is water retention, a common cause of bloating.

Even without cortisol, we tend to neglect ourselves when stressed out.

Late-night snacks, skipping meals, guzzling carbonated drinks, and high-sugar and high-salt snacks are common when we seek an emotional escape, all of which contribute to bingeing and bloating.

Medications and medical conditions

If lifestyle changes such as changing your diet, managing stress levels, regular exercise and avoiding lactose or fructose do not improve your condition, it would be advisable to check whether you have underlying medical conditions such as gallstones, diabetes or kidney disease.

Check with your doctor if you encounter such problems.