

Bloating (abdominal distension)

Bloating is the sensation when your tummy feels full, tight, or stretched. When the abdomen actually increases in size and becomes visibly larger, we call it abdominal distension.

Most people report feeling bloated from time to time, but for some it can be frequent or persistent, uncomfortable, and can end up affecting their day-to-day life.

What causes Bloating?

There is no one single cause of bloating. While it can be a result of "too much" gas, other factors such as how gas moves through your digestive tract or how your body perceives it are equally important.

- **Dietary Triggers:** Certain foods are highly "fermentable," meaning when they are broken down by gut bacteria, they produce gas as a byproduct of fermentation. Common culprits include beans, lentils, broccoli, cabbage, and artificial sweeteners (like sorbitol) (see: Low FODMAP diet for further information)
- **Swallowed Air:** Similar to belching, swallowing air while eating or drinking can lead to a build-up of gas in your tummy.
- **Slow Gut Motility:** If your gut moves slowly (constipation), gas has more time to accumulate.
- **Visceral Hypersensitivity:** In conditions like Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), the nerves in the gut become extra sensitive. Even a normal amount of gas can feel painful or "bloating".

Gut Microbiome Imbalance: Occasionally, an overgrowth of bacteria in the small intestine (Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth - SIBO) can lead to excessive fermentation and gas production.

How can I manage my Bloating?

Managing bloating often involves a combination of dietary adjustments and lifestyle changes.

Dietary Strategies

- **The Low FODMAP Diet:** This is a clinically proven approach for many patients with bloating. It involves temporarily reducing specific carbohydrates ([FODMAPs](#)) that are known to ferment in the gut.
- **Fiber Management:** While fiber is essential, a sudden increase can cause temporary bloating. It is best to increase fiber intake slowly and drink plenty of water.
- **Identify Intolerances:** Lactose (dairy), gluten, or fructose (fruit sugar) intolerances are common causes of bloating.
- **Food diary -** Documenting your daily intake alongside your symptoms is one of the most effective ways to identify specific dietary triggers. Tracking patterns over 2–3 weeks can help you find out 'problem' foods that may be contributing to your bloating.
- **Avoid carbonated drinks (fizzy drinks)** which can introduce gas in your digestive tract.

Lifestyle Tips

- **Gentle Movement:** A short walk after meals can help stimulate the digestive tract and move gas through the system.
- **Manage Constipation:** Keeping bowel movements regular is one of the most effective ways to reduce chronic bloating.
- **Mindful Eating:** Avoid "gulping" air by chewing slowly and avoiding carbonated drinks.

Do you need to see a specialist?

You may need specialist review if you have any of the following:

- Persistent bloating that does not resolve with dietary changes.
- A change in bowel habits (diarrhoea or constipation) that lasts more than 4-6 weeks.
- Blood in bowel motions.
- Unexplained weight loss or loss of appetite.
- Anemia or iron deficiency.
- A visible, persistent "lump" or swelling in the abdomen.

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