

Taming Tummy Troubles

We've all been there — Thanksgiving dinner, the table looks beautiful, there are ten different kinds of side dishes on the table next to the turkey and they all look amazingly delicious. You must try them all, so you overindulge in rich, fatty foods, then top it all off with a big slice of pecan or pumpkin pie. Later, you find yourself up at night with a stomach ache, a fiery feeling in your chest and possibly even diarrhea.

Holiday eating can often cause digestive distress, but tummy troubles can surface at any time of the year. There's a good chance you've experienced gas, diarrhea, constipation, and heartburn at least once in your lifetime. For those who encounter any of these problems more often than they'd like, there are many dietary and lifestyle strategies that can be used to help tame tummy troubles.

Constipation

Constipation is more common and potentially serious than you would ever imagine. Repeated bouts of constipation and straining can lead to diverticulosis, hemorrhoids and other more serious health problems. The solution to preventing this uncomfortable condition tends to be rather simple: eat more fiber-rich foods, drink plenty of water and exercise.

Aim to eat at least 40 grams of fiber each day. Starting the day with whole grains, such as *Café Fanny* organic granola, *Uncle Sam's* cereal, *Bob's Red Mill* muesli or oatmeal can help get things moving early on in the day. For an extra fiber boost, use *Westsoy* organic unsweetened vanilla or original soy milk instead of milk. At lunch, dinner and snacks, emphasize plant foods such as vegetables, fruit, beans, nuts, seeds



and whole, intact grains such as quinoa, barley and farro.

An adequate amount of water is essential for stool formation, especially if you increase your fiber intake, since fiber needs water in order to form stool. Increasing your fiber intake without drinking more fluids will result in gas and bloating. Try to drink at least 64 ounces of water a day.

Exercise is more important for regularity than most people realize. It helps tone the muscles in the digestive tract and relieve stress, which can make muscles tense and lead to constipation. Running and yoga can both help relieve constipation. You can also try the first twisting exercise described in the Soothing Exercises for Digestive Distress chart on page 3.

To promote regularity, try a daily probiotic supplement, such as *Culturelle*, which helps populate your gut with "good" indigenous bacteria. If you suffer with constipation frequently, on low-fiber days you can try a fiber supplement made from psyllium, like *Yerba Prima* psyllium husk caps, which can help by acting as a bulking agent. Take psyllium with lots of water.

Gas Pains and Flatulence

When gas gets trapped in the intestines it can be very painful. Bloating and gas often result from eating gas-forming foods without drinking enough water, adding a lot of fiber to your diet too quickly, eating foods that your body is sensitive to, going too long without eating or even hormonal changes.



Gelson's Registered Dietitian, Jessica Siegel, has a Masters in Public Health. However, she is not a doctor and her nutritional recommendations are not tailored to specific health problems. Consult your physician before beginning any nutritional program. To contact Jessica, please call her at 1-800-GELSONS.

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Dietary changes can be helpful for reducing gas. If you suspect that something in your diet is causing your gas pains, use a food journal to help identify and remove suspect foods. Foods that commonly cause gas are dairy products (due to lactose intolerance), sugar substitutes and sugar alcohols, and fat substitutes (found in some chips). When adding more plant foods to your diet, increase them gradually so your body can adjust to digesting larger and larger quantities of fiber. If you find that your gas and bloating resolve after you eat a meal, then you may be going too long without food and allowing air to build up in your stomach. Eating every three or four hours can help prevent this type of gas and bloating. Hormonal changes can also be the cause of digestive distress. Many women tend to have more bloating and gas at certain times of the month and during menopause due to hormone fluctuations. Talk to your doctor if you suspect that your tummy troubles are hormone-related.

To prevent and soothe gas symptoms, drink plenty of fluids throughout the day, eat every few hours and avoid carbonated beverages and drinking straws. After meals, try drinking a cup of peppermint tea or chewing on ½ teaspoon of fennel seeds to prevent gas. A probiotic supplement can aid in digestion and help your body break down fiber-rich foods to help prevent gas. To treat trapped gas, try the two gentle twisting and bending stretches described in the Soothing Exercises for Digestive Distress chart. If bloating and pain persist for more than three months and you have tried my recommended changes, talk to a gastroenterologist to rule out irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and celiac disease.

Diarrhea

Diarrhea can be acute or chronic. Acute cases usually last for a day or two and then resolve on their own. It is important to replenish lost fluids and electrolytes to prevent dehydration in these cases, especially in the case of children. Chronic diarrhea, which lasts for more than a month, should be taken seriously. It can be caused by a bacterial or viral infection, or it can be a sign that there is a problem with digestion and absorption somewhere in the digestive tract. Medications, chemotherapy and radiation treatment can also cause diarrhea.

Chronic diarrhea can be caused by food intolerances and sensitivities, such as those to lactose and sugar substitutes. Food sensitivities are very individual and may be caused by any food. Using a food journal to track the foods you eat and GI symptoms can help you identify suspect foods, which can then be removed from your diet. Diarrhea can also be a symptom of digestive disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome

(IBS), inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) and celiac disease. See a gastroenterologist to rule out these conditions. Certain antacids and blood pressure medications can cause diarrhea, so talk to your doctor about alternatives if you experience this side effect. Diarrhea can also result from antibiotic use. In this case, it is important to use a probiotic supplement in conjunction with antibiotics in order to prevent antibiotic-associated diarrhea. *Lactobacillus GG*, the strain of bacteria in *Culturelle*, has been shown to reduce and even prevent antibiotic-associated diarrhea.

To prevent bacterial and viral infections that can cause diarrhea, use good hygiene practices: wash your hands frequently, especially before and after preparing food, before eating and after using the restroom. When traveling to developing countries, drink bottled water and avoid eating raw fruits and vegetables. Also consider taking a probiotic supplement while abroad. When experiencing a bout of diarrhea, follow the BRAT diet (bananas, rice, applesauce and toast) and avoid irritating foods such as dairy products, caffeine, alcohol, fatty foods and spicy foods. And don't forget to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

Heartburn

If your heartburn occurs more than twice a week, it may be acid reflux or GERD, a serious condition that can also include symptoms of burping, nausea, coughing, bloating, a sour taste in the mouth and even an irksome little cough. If you are overweight or pregnant, smoke, take certain medications or have a family history of GERD, then you are much more likely to experience it. Although you can't change your genes or speed up your pregnancy, you can modify your eating and lifestyle habits and explore alternatives to your medications with your doctor or pharmacist.

Losing weight can help relieve heartburn symptoms, especially for women, since estrogen may be related to some cases of GERD. Carrying weight around the midsection puts extra pressure on the stomach, which can force stomach acid upwards into the esophagus and connected organs. Since men and some women tend to carry extra weight in that area, losing weight will be helpful for those with apple-shaped bodies, too. Similarly, avoid wearing tight clothing, especially belts and waistbands,

GERD Irritants

- Carrying extra weight, especially around the middle
- Pregnancy
- Smoking
- Lying down too soon after eating
- Overeating
- Wearing tight clothes
- Stress
- Constipation
- Drinking alcohol
- Eating fatty, spicy, acidic or starchy foods
- Being sedentary

GERD Soothers

- Losing weight
- Stopping smoking
- Remaining vertical 2-3 hours after eating
- Elevating your head of bed
- Sleeping on your left side
- Eating small frequent meals
- Wearing loose clothing
- Using a relaxation technique
- Eating plenty of fiber
- Minimizing alcohol intake
- Avoiding foods and drinks that irritate you
- Increasing protein in diet
- Exercising



“Aim to eat at least 40 grams of fiber each day.”

since it can put pressure on your stomach that can cause acid reflux.

What and how you eat can also have a major effect on your heartburn—just think about how you feel after a Thanksgiving meal. Overfilling your stomach with food puts upward pressure on your lower esophageal sphincter, which forces stomach contents up into your esophagus. Therefore, eating five smaller meals instead of three larger meals may be helpful if you tend to overeat. Most people with GERD find that certain foods are irritating, but those foods are different for everyone. Commonly irritating foods and beverages are coffee (decaf and regular), carbonated drinks, fruit juices, alcohol, deep fried foods, spicy foods, fatty foods, acidic foods, chocolate, peppermint, tomato products, citrus, garlic, dairy products and starchy grains such as rice and wheat. The best way to figure out what affects you is to keep a food journal. Drinking chamomile tea throughout the day may help soothe the stomach and esophagus. Another potentially helpful strategy is to cut back on fluids that you drink while eating and drink most fluids in between meals. Water is the best choice, since it is hydrating and free of any potential irritants. Also try higher protein meals instead of starchy or fatty meals, since protein helps the lower esophageal sphincter stay shut. Plenty of fiber is also important

for helping food move through you in a downward direction. Aim for at least 40 grams of fiber a day.

Sleep position also seems to play a major role in treating GERD. Elevating the head of your bed when you sleep and sleeping on your left side can be tremendously helpful. Stomach contents seem to stay put better when GERD sufferers sleep on their left sides as opposed to any other sleeping position. Use a foam wedge on top of your mattress or blocks under the bed frame to elevate the head of your bed four to six inches; it's important to elevate your whole upper body, not just your head, so that gravity can help move food downwards. It's also imperative to remain vertical for at least two hours after eating, so avoid late dinners and midnight snacks. Wait 30–60 minutes after eating and then go for a walk to help move things along.

Smoking can have the most influence on GERD and smoking even one cigarette occasionally is known to irritate the digestive system and relax the sphincter between the esophagus and stomach, allowing stomach acid to reflux upwards,

so quitting smoking entirely can help cure GERD for most smokers.

Finally, stress can really irritate your digestive tract. Try relaxation techniques like deep breathing and meditation, or even walking or yoga—whatever helps you feel calmer inside. Regular exercise can help tone the gut muscles and improve blood flow to the digestive tract.

The bottom line is that quitting smoking, losing weight, elevating the head of your bed and sleeping on your left side are the most helpful measures for alleviating GERD. Since dietary irritants are very individual, there is no clear-cut food that should be eliminated, though it's important to figure out what irritates you and avoid it.

Eating should be a pleasurable and gratifying experience, not a painful and regretful one. If you're suffering from gas, bloating, diarrhea, constipation or GERD, then try the strategies discussed here to help bring the enjoyment back to eating. Prolonged discomfort with any or all of these symptoms is not normal and should be investigated by a physician.

Soothing Exercises for Digestive Distress	
Condition	Soothing Stretches
Constipation, Bloating and Gas, GERD	Sit sideways in a chair with a low back, feet planted on the floor under your knees. Close your eyes and take deep, calming breaths. Sit up tall and as you exhale, turn towards the back of the chair and take a hold of it. Inhale into your ribcage. As you exhale, twist your torso and head further towards the back of the chair. Go deeper into the twist with each exhale, but not beyond your comfort zone. Hold the pose for several breaths, gently release, and repeat on the other side.
Bloating and Gas, GERD	Sit as described above. As you inhale, lift your chest and sit tall. As you exhale, gently roll your torso over your lap, bending from the hips and leading with your chest. Allow your head and arms to hang down freely and take a few relaxing breaths. Gently roll up to the starting position on an inhale. Repeat 4–6 times.
GERD	Lie flat on your back with your feet slightly apart, arms at your sides with palms facing up. Close your eyes and as you slowly inhale, expand all sides of your belly. As you slowly exhale, contract your belly. Pause and repeat 20–30 times.

Food of the Month: Apples

The ancient Greeks and Romans were smart to count among their favorite foods this fruit from the rose family. Apples have much to offer in the way of flavor, versatility and health benefits.

Apples contain potassium and vitamin C, but they also boast some exciting phytonutrients. Quercetin, a polyphenol also found in onions, blueberries, red grapes, red wine and tea, has antioxidant and anti-inflammatory activity. It is believed to help slow the growth and spread of malignant cells, especially lung, prostate and colon cancer cells. Scientists are also looking into quercetin's role in protecting against allergies, asthma, memory loss and Alzheimer's disease. Apples contain lots of flavonoids from the polyphenol group, as well. Flavonoids have antioxidant powers, which can help reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke, in addition to preventing the spread of cancer cells. And that old saying "an apple a day keeps the doctor away" is true—it refers to preventing constipation; apples contain lots of good insoluble fiber to help keep you regular. Apples are also a source of a cholesterol-lowering soluble fiber called pectin.

With just 80 calories, 5 grams of fiber and their own edible packaging, they're the perfect fast fruit (be sure to enjoy apples with the skin since much of their fiber and vitamin C is in and just below the skin). A medium-sized apple also offers 13% DV of vitamin C, and 5% DV of potassium.

Apples take up over half of one of our produce diamonds around this time of year, since we offer so many varieties of organically grown and conventionally grown varieties from Fuji to Gold Crisp crab apples. When shopping, choose hard apples with no bruises. I always have the best luck with apples that still have their stems attached. At home, store them in the refrigerator—the cold enhances the texture



"Apples are a source of cholesterol-lowering soluble fiber called pectin."

and the flavor and prolongs freshness. By storing them on the counter top, they will not only get mushy quickly, they will lose some of their nutrient content. Unlike pears, apples ripen on the tree instead of off. The forbidden fruit doesn't require much prep; just wash and eat. You can use a special apple corer-slicer to cut perfect wedges quickly and safely. If you're cooking with apples, try to leave the skin on in order to retain the most nutrients.

Apples make an excellent low-calorie snack, dessert or meal accompaniment. I love to cook with them and incorporate them into salads. Certain apples are versatile enough for both eating and cooking: Granny Smith, Braeburn, Golden Delicious, Rome and Fuji. Check out our small-crop, locally grown organic Granny Smith and Fuji apples this month.

Apples pair well with almonds, apricots, cardamom, cheese, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, lemon, nutmeg, quince, rosemary, sage and vanilla. This month, try my recipes for Icebox Blueberry Applesauce (a no-cook recipe) and Sautéed Baby Kale with Apples.

Read My Blog!

I want to help you raise healthy eaters, so I write a blog called *Healthy Families* for our website, www.gelsons.com. I document my experiences and thoughts about feeding my 2-year-old daughter and hopefully impart some worthwhile nutritional wisdom to my readers. Please check it weekly and join me on this very important parenting journey.