



You and Your Gut – Common GI Symptoms

Do you frequently suffer with heartburn, abdominal pain / discomfort, bloating or constipation? If so, you're not alone.



These gastrointestinal / gut symptoms are experienced by an estimated 30% of the western adult population, and commonly amongst shift workers.

Sometimes there is an underlying medical condition, which should be ruled out first.

More often the cause is a combination of diet, psychosocial and cultural factors, ranging from stress to overindulgence in spicy food.

Often, some dietary changes can really help alleviate these 'IBS'-type symptoms.

What does a healthy gut mean?

Your gut breaks down food so that nutrients and fluids can be taken up in the intestine and provide energy for the body.

70-80% of the body's immune system is in the gut, so provides important immune function against sickness and disease.

The gut is called the "second brain," so the health of our gut can really affect how we think and feel.

It houses the intestinal microbiome, a vast population of gut bacteria and other microbes. We can nurture the beneficial microbes through diet and by managing toxins and stress.

One of the key nutritional recommendations is to increase **dietary fibre**. Intake is often lower than the advised 30g per day for adults. If you can tolerate adding fibre to your diet without symptoms initially getting any worse, these are good sources:-

- Wholegrains
- Nuts and seeds
- Vegetables
- Fruit

If symptoms do increase, you may want to seek nutritional support in eliminating any intolerances, take time for some gut healing, and gradually be able to reintroduce these beneficial food groups.

Five Fine Facts About Fibre

1. Increasing dietary fibre can help to reduce cholesterol
2. It helps to manage blood sugar and reduce the post-meal spike, which can reduce your risk of type 2 diabetes.
3. Increased stool bulk can help to tackle constipation and encourage regular elimination of waste.
4. Certain fibres feed your beneficial gut microbiome (bugs), and keep them in healthy balance.
5. Fibrous foods can be more filling than foods made up of simple carbohydrates, which can help you to manage your appetite. This can also be effective with weight management.

Other lifestyle factors

If you work shifts, eating during the night when your digestive system is having a rest, can increase the likelihood of these gastrointestinal symptoms.

Reducing your intake of processed foods, and foods high in fat and sugar is a good place to start, particularly during the night. Stick to more plant-based food choices, as they are generally more easy to digest at night.

Remember your fluids, as poor hydration can increase chances of constipation.

Looking to manage stress is also key. Stress can inflame the gut, so eating can aggravate the delicately thin gut lining and trigger symptoms. Think about how our stomach can feel tied up in knots if we are anxious about something. This can affect the digestion and absorption of those nutrients needed to nourish you.

Taking time to evaluate your stress levels and the causes of stress in your life may be helpful in prioritising your gut health and you.

