



Q: What's bloating and its common causes?

A: Bloating is a condition where your tummy feels full, tight, and stretched often due to gas trapped in the intestine. Gas gets caught in the digestive tract in two ways: when you swallow air and when bacteria in your large intestine break down undigested food. Most stomach gas results from swallowing air and is typically released by burping, though a small amount can continue down to the colon (large intestine) to be released as flatulence. Most of the gas that causes flatulence is produced when bacteria in the large intestine break down food that was incompletely digested by enzymes in the stomach and small intestine. Certain carbohydrates are the main culprits. Protein and fat aren't major gas producers, although fats, because they slow down digestion, can contribute to a sense of bloating. Other frequent causes may be due to pregnancy or medical conditions, such as constipation, food intolerance like lactose intolerance, Celiac Disease, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD), and even cancer.

Q: How can people treat bloating at home without consulting a physician?

A: Symptoms of abdominal bloating can be reduced or prevented with a few lifestyle changes which include: lose weight, if you're overweight; reduce or avoid intake of carbonated drinks; drink from a cup or glass and not from a bottle or through a straw; eat slowly in a relaxed environment and chew your food well; eat smaller, more frequent meals instead of large meals; reduce the intake of fermentable foods; don't chew gum; eat foods high in fibre and drink lots of water if constipated; exercise regularly to improve your digestion and reduce constipation; lastly, practice yoga or a similar discipline can help with relaxation and good breathing techniques.

Q: When should people with bloating see a doctor?

A: If bloating is not improving and you are also experiencing other symptoms like abdominal pain, blood in stools, diarrhea, vomiting and unexplained weight loss, you should consult a doctor who can help you to find the root cause of your problem and recommend the best treatment.

Q: Can you recommend a good diet and other ways to prevent bloating?

A: A low fermentable diet can be beneficial to prevent and improve bloating symptoms. It is low in fermentable oligosaccharides, disaccharides, monosaccharides, and polyols (FODMAP). These carbohydrates are poorly absorbed in the small intestine and pass in the colon where they are fermented by the bacteria with a consequent production of gas. The most common gas-producing foods usually include the following:

- Wheat, rye, onions, garlic, broccoli, cabbage, soy-based products, pistachio, cashew nuts, and legumes are examples of complex carbohydrates - oligosaccharides. One exception is wheat bran, which passes through your digestive system without getting broken down. This makes wheat bran a winner if you have constipation and need more fibre but also suffer from flatulence.
- Lactose found in milk and dairy products is an example of disaccharides.
- Fructose present in honey, sweeteners like corn syrup, sodas, and certain fruits like apple, pear, watermelon, and mango are examples of monosaccharides.
- Artificial sweeteners, stone fruits, apples, pears and some vegetables such as mushrooms and cauliflower are examples of polyols.

This diet, however, can be very restrictive and can also have potential side effects if self-administered, especially for people who suffer from constipation. Patients would need the help of a trained dietitian to find the best solution and adjust the diet based on their medical condition.

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