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Digestive System- Bloating (Part 1)

Most of us have experienced the feeling of being bloated, when your tummy is stretched, puffy and uncomfortable. It often happens after a big weekend or over a festive season (Christmas/New Year). But for some people, bloating is more than an occasional inconvenience.

If your stomach or tummy often feels bloated, it could be due to:

- food intolerance
- irritable bowel syndrome
- constipation
- swallowing air (from talking while eating etc)
- excess wind



Food intolerance

- Your bowel doesn't empty properly.
- The food causes gas to be trapped.
- Too much gas is produced as a reaction to the food.

The onset of symptoms is usually slower and may be delayed by many hours after eating the offending food. The symptoms may also last for several hours, even into the next day and sometimes longer. Intolerance to several foods or a group of foods is not uncommon.

With food intolerance, some people can tolerate a reasonable amount of the food, but if they eat too much (or too often) they get symptoms because their body cannot tolerate unlimited amounts.

Elimination followed by reintroduction

The main issues are usually wheat or gluten and dairy (lactose) products. The best approach if you have a food intolerance is to eat less of the culprit food or cut it out completely.

Embarking on a diet, which excludes certain foods to help find out what is causing symptoms, is known as an **Exclusion Diet**. Certain foods are excluded for a set period of time to see if the symptoms improve or resolve. This is followed by a reintroduction phase of the diet so that a clear diagnosis can be obtained. These diets can lack essential nutrients, so it is vital they are supervised by a Registered Dietitian.

Wheat sensitivity

Also known as wheat intolerance or simply trouble digesting wheat is increasingly common.

There are three key health problems caused by wheat.

- **Wheat sensitivity:** symptoms like bloating, cramps, diarrhea and sickness come on quite slowly, usually hours after eating wheat.
- **Wheat allergy:** reactions usually begin within minutes and include itching, rash, tongue or lip swelling and wheezing. Allergy occurs when the body's immune system reacts to something that is usually harmless because it mistakenly registers that substance as a threat. In wheat-allergic people, the immune system treats one or more of the proteins in wheat as a danger to the body and starts an allergic reaction when wheat is eaten, touched or inhaled.
- **Coeliac Disease:** also known as gluten intolerance, is a autoimmune disease condition where your intestine can't absorb gluten found in wheat, barley, oats and rye.

The main sources of wheat

- Bread
- Pasta
- Cereals
- Couscous
- Cakes and pastries
- Biscuits
- Doughnuts
- Hydrolyzed Vegetable Protein (HVP)
- Beer
- Soy sauce



Avoiding wheat can be easier said than done, especially wheat is found in a wide range of foods. Luckily, there are now many wheat-free products available.

If you have bloating or other minor symptoms after eating bread, you can try an elimination diet. This is where you completely cut out wheat from your diet for four weeks then bring it back in gradually to see if symptoms reappear. If your symptoms are severe and long-lasting, especially if you have blood in your stools, vomiting or painful stomach cramps, see your doctor.

In order to avoid the long-term complications of the disease, a strict wheat/gluten-free diet is required, get your expert advice from a Registered Dietitian.

Lactose intolerant

Lactose intolerant, meaning they lack an enzyme needed to digest the main sugar in milk, and African-Americans, Asians, and American Indians are most likely to have the condition.

Ranging in severity from person to person, symptoms include cramping, bloating, gas, nausea, and diarrhea. These usually occur 30 minutes to two hours after one drinks or eats a dairy product.

Doctors can test for lactose intolerance using a breath test, which detects heightened levels of hydrogen; a blood test, before which the patient drinks a lactose-containing beverage; or a test of stool acidity (which undigested lactose helps generate).

Milk

A major source of lactose is milk, including cow's milk, goat's milk and sheep's milk.

Depending on how mild or severe your lactose intolerance is, you may need to change the amount of milk in your diet. For example:

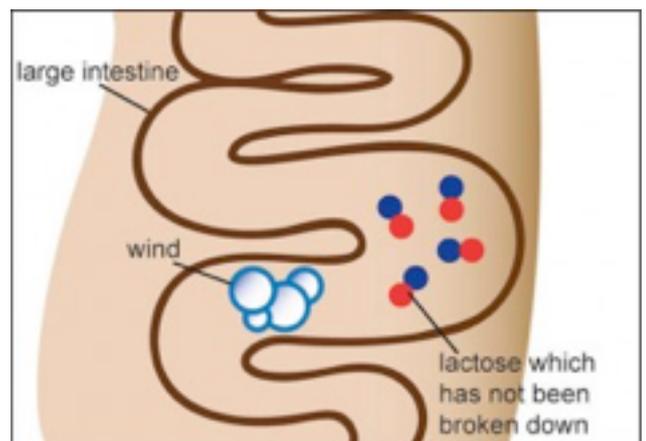
- You may be able to have milk in your tea or coffee, but not on your cereal.
- Some products containing milk, such as milk chocolate, may still be acceptable in small quantities.
- You may find that drinking milk as part of a meal, rather than on its own, improves how the lactose is absorbed.

Food and drink containing lactose

As well as dairy products, there are other food and drinks that contain lactose. Depending on how intolerant you are to lactose, you may need to remove them from your diet.

These include:

- Salad cream, salad dressing and mayonnaise
- Biscuits
- Chocolate
- Boiled sweets
- Cakes
- Peanut butter
- Bread and other baked goods
- Some breakfast cereals
- Packets of mixes to make pancakes and biscuits
- Packets of instant potatoes and instant soup
- Some processed meats, such as sliced ham



Check the ingredients of all food and drink products carefully, because milk or lactose are often hidden ingredients.

If even a small amount of milk triggers your symptoms, there are some alternatives that you can try, such as soya milk. You can now also buy milk that is made from rice, oats, potatoes and even peas.