

# Why am I bloated? Here are some possibilities to consider

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If your tummy seems to feel full or stretched and is rumbling all the time, you're not alone. Up to [30%](#) of people of all ages experience bloating, with symptoms such as gassiness, a sense of fullness and pressure.

This can be with or without [distention](#) (a visible increase in abdominal girth).

So what might be behind your bloating?

## The role of gas

Bloating is in fact a complex condition that can be caused by several direct and indirect factors. Gas often plays a role.

Gas production in the [digestive system](#) is part of the normal digestion process, and is released through the mouth (burps) or anus (farts).

On average, our gas expulsion is around [600–700 milliliters](#) per day, resulting in around 14 farts a day. That said, there isn't a set number for the normal amount of gas or expulsions; each body is different.

Bloating can occur as a result of retained gas, excess gas production, altered gas transit (changes in the speed and movement of gas), or intestinal hypersensitivity.

An imbalanced gut microbiome can lead to the overproduction of gas.

We have more than [40 trillion microbes](#) living in and on our body. They can be helpful or harmful. The balance between these helpful and harmful microbes plays an important role in our immune response, metabolism and health.

These bacteria need food to survive. Their food comes from fermenting carbohydrates such as dietary fiber from the plants we eat.

One of the byproducts of this fermentation process is hydrogen gas.

Most of these microbes live in the lower parts of our intestine (colon). The upper parts of the intestine ([small intestine](#)) have far fewer microbes.

But if an excessive number of microbes colonize the small intestine (a condition known as [small intestine bacterial overgrowth](#)), more gas is produced in the small intestine.

This can lead to [bloating, abdominal discomfort, diarrhea and nausea](#).

## Could it be IBS, lactose issues or FODMAPs?

Some disorders of the intestine and colon can affect the amount of gas and severity of bloating symptoms.

For example, in constipation, movement of stools is reduced, allowing more time for the bacteria to ferment the stool content, increasing gas production.

Bloating is also very common in people with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

[Changes](#) in gut muscle tone and greater sensitivity to gas contribute to bloating in IBS sufferers.

Bloating may also occur because of poor digestion and malabsorption of some [carbohydrates](#).

Lactose malabsorption (in those with [lactose intolerance](#)) is a common issue.

Symptoms may also occur with other digestive resistant short-chain carbohydrates known as [FODMAPs](#) (fermentable oligo-, di-, monosaccharides and polyols).

FODMAPs are found in a wide variety of foods, including certain fruit and vegetables, grains and cereals, nuts, legumes, lentils and dairy foods.

While these are good foods for our gut bacteria, they can add to gas production and trigger bloating symptoms, especially in people with digestive disorders (like IBS). They can also cause water to be drawn into the intestines, causing distension. This can contribute to bloating.

## **Other factors: salt, hormones or swallowing air**

There are of course other factors that could be behind bloating.

For example, consuming too much sodium or salt in your diet causes [water retention](#), resulting in abdominal distention. But this may also [alter](#) the gut microbiome and influence [gas production](#).

For many women, bloating can be linked to the menstrual cycle phase. This is most common at the onset of bleeding, when peak [fluid retention occurs](#), but is also related to [underlying hormonal changes](#).

[Swallowing too much air](#), especially when eating, can also increase the amount of gas entering the gastrointestinal tract and lead to bloating.

Talking while eating, eating in a rush, and carbonated beverages can also increase the amount of air swallowed.

## **How can I reduce bloating?**

Dietary strategies can be effective ways of managing bloating. While foods that trigger symptoms can be different for everyone, you could try to:

- [eat fewer gas-producing FODMAP foods](#) such as onion, cabbage, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, dried beans and lentils

- eat fewer foods containing lactose, like milk, ice-cream and some yogurts (there are lactose-free alternatives for people with intolerance)
- replace carbonated drinks such as soft-drinks with water, and drink less alcohol
- consume more [probiotics](#) (such as yogurt or certain fermented foods)
- do more exercise, as mild physical activity enhances intestinal gas clearance and can [reduce symptoms of abdominal bloating](#)
- eat and drink more slowly; taking your time means you can enjoy your food, but will also help you swallow less air.

See an accredited practicing dietitian for personalized advice on managing symptoms using dietary strategies.

## When to see a GP

Most of the time, bloating goes away soon enough and is no cause for concern. But consider seeing a doctor if:

- your gas is persistent and severe and it's impacting your quality of life
- your gas is associated with other symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, unintentional weight loss or blood in the stool.

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