

KEEPING BLOATING AT BAY

BLOATING IS A VERY COMMON SYMPTOM. It varies from a feeling of fullness soon after eating, to having a distended abdomen such that the clothes feel tight and totally no appetite to eat.

Bloating can be caused by any of the organs in the abdomen, including the gallbladder, stomach, small intestines and large intestines. Less commonly, it can also be caused by excessive fluid in the cavity, which may be due to a heart problem, liver problem or kidney problem.

Bloating can be due to actual physical distension of the stomach or intestines by gas, liquids or faeces, or it could just be a sensation of distension due to hypersensitivity of the nerves of the intestines. Gastric (stomach) causes of bloating usually results in the distension feeling at the upper part of the abdomen. It is usually due to either gastritis or gallstones. Gallstones usually causes bloating after eating oily or fried food, whereas gastritis usually results after eating sour or spicy food. So depending on the cause of the bloating, these are the best foods to avoid.

On the other hand, bloating in the colon (large intestines) is usually due to constipation. Constipation occurs when the stools are dry

and hard, and do not move along the colon fast enough. The problem is aggravated when more water is absorbed out of the stools when it stays longer in the colon. Though the usual advice for constipation and bloating is to take more fibre and water, there are some people whose intestines cannot tolerate too much fibre and additional fibre actually aggravates the situation. For these people, the solution is actually to reduce fibre intake.

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is the most common cause of bloating affecting the small and large intestines. Though IBS may also cause pain and diarrhea, there are some people with IBS who just feel bloated, though looking at them physically, the abdomen is actually not distended.

The major concern with bloating symptoms is that it can also be caused by more serious health problems such as stomach or colon cancer, liver cancer or liver failure. As a guide, if the bloating persists for more than two weeks, it is advisable to seek medical attention. For stomach or colon issues, gastroscopy or colonoscopy may be required to rule out cancers, whereas an ultrasound or CT scan may be required to diagnose liver or gallstone problems. ■



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