- Digestion

HEALTH

SOLUTIONS

Soothe an Upset Stomach

Expert-backed ways to remedy common tummy troubles

BY GINA WAY



Who hasn't felt stuffed to the gills after a big meal? Or had indigestion from a spicy one? Or experienced poop problems for no apparent reason? Often the cause and the effect are pretty clear. "If someone consistently has stomach upset after eating a specific food, that pinpoints a particular trigger, which is a good start toward finding a solution," says Wendi LeBrett, M.D., a gastroenterologist in Boise, ID. A host of non-food-related factors can be GI culprits too—including stress, medications, and underlying medical conditions like irritable bowel syndrome—so piecing it together isn't always easy.

Take heartburn, for instance. Spicy, acidic, and fried foods tend to exacerbate symptoms of acid reflux, but this burning sensation can also be worsened by various meds and supplements, and also pregnancy. Frequent indigestion could signal sensitivity to a certain food or point to a stomach ulcer. Meanwhile, studies show that anxiety and stress can trigger constipation, as can lifestyle changes like travel and sleep disruptions.

Most stomach upset is temporary and can be eased by adjusting your diet or taking an over-the-counter medication. "But if your symptoms are persistent, last for more than a few days, or happen so consistently that they affect your daily life, it's time to see a doctor," says Dr. LeBrett. When digestive distress does occur, taking these simple steps may help you find some relief.

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HERE'S EXACTLY WHAT TO DO...

IF HEARTBURN HITS

Take an OTC acid-blocking medication for temporary relief, but don't pop antacids after every meal. "If it happens often and antacids aren't helping, see your doctor. Chronic acid reflux can lead to other complications," says Dr. LeBrett. A doctor can suggest other meds to try or do tests to investigate the cause of your symptoms.

EXTRA RELIEF

Sit upright until the burning subsides. (If you're lying down, gravity can't move stomach acid down your esophagus.) Taking small sips of water can also help clear away acid, advises Joy Bauer, M.S., R.D.N., author of *Joy Bauer's Superfood!*

IF YOU FEEL QUEASY

Nibbling something bland, like a cracker or dry toast, can help tamp down the feeling. "An empty stomach can worsen nausea," says Bauer, who also recommends drinking tea made from fresh ginger root to help settle a sick stomach. Stick with plain yet nourishing foods like eggs and applesauce until the nausea passes.

EXTRA RELIEF

Sniff a fresh lemon or peppermint oil—studies suggest that inhaling these scents may help reduce the severity of nausea. "It distracts your brain from the nauseated feeling," explains Dr. LeBrett. Consuming peppermint is also a popular stomach-settling tactic.

WHEN YOU'RE BLOATED

It's often because of constipation, so "try eating kiwi, which has been shown to be as effective as some traditional laxatives," Dr. LeBrett says. Slowly incorporating more fiber-filled fruits and veggies, whole grains, and nuts and seeds is key, Bauer adds—and drink extra H_2O, as "staying hydrated helps with gas, constipation, and overall digestion."

EXTRA RELIEF

Anything that causes you to swallow air can trigger uncomfortable bloating, so be careful about chewing gum, using a straw, and gulping down food. Being physically active during the day as well as taking a post-meal stroll can also help you beat bloat.

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