

Gut Together Guide

Join the conversation.



GUT
TOGETHER

Gut Together Guide

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Gut Together Guide

What's it all about?

We've all got guts, 25ft of them in fact. But the truth is, we're not very good at talking about them.

There's a taboo surrounding our poo and whilst it might not seem like a problem to keep the tales of your toilet trips to yourself, not feeling comfortable talking about our gut health means that we might be less likely to talk about things when we're experiencing problems.

As part of our Let's Talk Guts campaign, we're encouraging people to get together and have open, honest conversations about gut health with the aim that it becomes something we all feel more comfortable doing.

We get it - it might feel out of the ordinary to begin with, and it's normal to feel worried or embarrassed about digestive symptoms or to think that they might go away on their own. But it's vital that everyone feels able to talk about their guts and, importantly, seek help when it's needed.

This July, we're encouraging you to Gut Together with those around you and start chatting about your guts - whether it's with family or friends, colleagues or peers, or members of groups or communities you're part of.

You can have a Gut Together whenever you like, wherever you like, for however long you like. Our Gut Together Guide shares conversation starters, topics and myth-busters to help you get going.

Gut Together

With family and friends



Gut Together

With family or friends

Where to do it

- At home
- In a coffee shop
- In the car
- Over the phone
- On a walk
- Anywhere else you like!

How to do it

Talking about our guts doesn't have to be about having a serious, sit down conversation. You can do it anywhere, anytime. The more comfortable we feel, the easier it will be to open up, so choose somewhere that feels right for you and get chatting. A simple, 'Have you ever struggled with your gut health?' can be a great place to start if you've never shared before. Need some inspiration? Head to page 10 onwards for some topics to help you get started.

Supporting a loved one

If you're having a Gut Together with someone living with digestive conditions and symptoms, try these conversation starters to better understand what they're experiencing and how you can support them.

1. If you need to change plans or leave a social gathering suddenly because of your gut, how do you prefer to tell people and how do you like them to respond?
2. If we're arranging to meet up, what are some of the things you need to consider beforehand? E.g. choosing a place near toilet facilities, picking the place where we eat, organising something at home instead.
3. What's the most supportive thing someone has ever said or done when you weren't feeling well, and how did it help?
4. How can we make it easier for you to talk about your digestive health with us?
5. What is one thing you'd like people to better understand about living with a digestive condition?

Gut Together

With colleagues



Gut Together

With colleagues

Where to do it

- In person
- Online

How to do it

We get it, talking about your gut health at work probably doesn't feel like the most comfortable thing to do. And you're not alone if you've ever tried to hold in wind at your desk or wondered if your colleagues thought you were in the toilet too long. But we all have guts, and we should never feel embarrassed by completely normal things.

Host a Gut Together with colleagues in a way that works for you - whether it's a casual drop-in session, a quick 10-minute conversation over a cuppa, or an organised in-person event where everyone's invited to learn more about digestive health.

Ready to get chatting? Head to page 10 to check out our conversation starter topics and myth-busters!

Supporting a colleague

If you're an employer or colleague working with someone who lives with a digestive condition, try these conversation starters to show you're interested in better understanding their condition and how you can support them:

1. What is one thing that you'd like people to better understand about your digestive condition?
2. What are some of the ways that your digestive condition impacts you at work?
3. What are some of the ways that I can help you when you're in a flare-up or having a difficult day because of your digestive condition?

Gut Together

In your community or group



Gut Together

in your community or group

Where to do it

- In person
- Online

How to do it

If you're part of a social, activity-based or community group, why not get everyone together to talk about their guts? Set a time and a place and invite people along to join the conversation.

Host a Gut Together in a way that works for you, whether it's a quick 10-minute conversation at the start of your usual activities or a structured gathering dedicated to gut health, where groups of people mix and chat to one another about different topics and come together to learn more.

Ready to get chatting? Head to page 10 onwards to check out our ice breakers, conversation starters and myth-busters!

Sharing personal experiences

If a member of your group or community is affected by a digestive condition or symptoms and feels comfortable sharing their personal experiences, why not ask them if they'd like to speak to the group? Hearing personal stories can help people to better understand digestive conditions and the real impact they have on people's everyday lives. An opportunity to ask questions can help boost knowledge and understanding, open up the conversation further, and help people to better support those around them who are living with digestive conditions.

Gut Together

topics to get you talking



Let's talk...

Ice breakers

These fun, lighthearted conversation starters are designed to get people talking about their guts for the first time. You can use them with anyone, and they're great to help you get the conversation started or if you've only got 10 minutes to Gut Together.

1. What's one word you'd use to describe how comfortable you feel talking about your gut health?
2. What's one thing you could never give up, even if someone told you it wasn't good for your gut?
3. Where's your favourite place to poo?
4. What's your favourite way to look after your gut health?
5. If your gut could talk, what would it say about how you treat it?
6. What's one thing you've heard about gut health that you're not sure is true?



Let's Talk...

Food

Food is something that many of us enjoy in social settings, from sitting around the dinner table with our family to socialising with friends. What we eat can have a big impact on our digestive system too, so it's the perfect topic of conversation for your Gut Together.

Try these questions to get the conversation flowing:

1. What is your go-to food when you want your gut to feel good?
2. We all have that food that we love, but sometimes our gut doesn't. What's yours?
3. When your gut is feeling sensitive, what is your ultimate comfort food?



Let's Talk...

Lifestyle

These conversation starters help to bring our guts to exactly where they should be – into everyday conversation.

1. When life gets incredibly busy, what's the first healthy habit that you usually drop, and how do you think it affects your gut?
2. What does 'listening to your gut' look like for you in your daily routine?
3. If your digestive system could talk to you right now, what do you think it would be asking for? (More sleep? Better hydration? A rest?)
4. When your gut is feeling a bit 'off', what is your go-to reset? Is it a specific type of gentle movement, a low-stress activity or a particular habit you swear by to get you back on track?
5. What's one gut-friendly habit you'd like to try and build into your everyday routine?



Gut Together...

And bust these gut myths!

Do you know how to separate fact from fiction when it comes to your gut? Whether you've watched a video on social media sharing the latest gut health trend or overheard someone share something they've done to boost their gut health, we've no doubt that you've come across a false tale or two when it comes to digestive health.

Whoever you're having a Gut Together with, these myth-busters will be sure to start an interesting conversation, and you might just learn something new along the way!

Use these common gut myths to start the conversation. Skip the next two pages until you're ready to share the facts!

- Myth #1: You should poo once per day
- Myth #2: Gut bacteria are harmful
- Myth #3: Bloating is always bad
- Myth #4: The average UK adult eats enough fibre
- Myth #5: I should detox my gut
- Myth #6: Diarrhoea indicates an infection
- Myth #7: There's no link between the gut and brain
- Myth #8: Exercise isn't necessary for my gut health
- Myth #9: I should do a gut microbiome test (poo-test)



Gut Together...

Common gut myths, busted!

Myth #1: You should poo once per day

Busted: It's considered normal to have a bowel movement between three times a day and three times a week, but everyone is different. If you have regular bowel movements, don't have any ongoing symptoms of constipation or diarrhoea, and can go without straining or using laxatives, it's considered normal.

Top tip: Get to know your normal by checking the colour, consistency and frequency of your poo using our Poo-Torial tool. Go to gutscharity.org.uk/poo-torial.

Myth #2: Gut bacteria are harmful

Busted: Your gut is home to trillions of bacteria and microorganisms. Some can be harmful and cause infections, but most offer huge benefits. They break down the fibre in our food, which we otherwise couldn't digest, and they support our immune system.

Myth #3: Bloating is always bad

Busted: Occasional bloating is completely normal and likely something most of us will experience at some point. Although it might feel uncomfortable, it usually isn't a sign of anything serious. If you experience persistent bloating for three weeks or more, then you should speak to your doctor.

Myth #4: The average UK adult eats enough fibre

Busted: The recommended daily fibre intake for adults is 30g, but in the UK, we're not getting nearly enough of the stuff. On average, we're eating 19g of fibre per day, meaning we need to increase our intake by more than a third.

Top tip: If you're looking to add more fibre to your diet, start small and build up. Adding too much fibre too quickly can actually cause unwanted digestive symptoms like bloating!

Myth #5: I should detox my gut

Busted: There's no scientific evidence to suggest that 'detoxing' has health benefits for your gut. Liquid-based diets, laxatives or colonic irrigation aren't necessary for good gut health and shouldn't be used unless advised by a medical professional. Your body is well-equipped to do its own detoxification, and your digestive system plays a key role in this. Your liver breaks down chemicals, alcohol, and medications, whilst your colon removes waste products and toxins from your food through your poo.

Myth #6: Diarrhoea indicates an infection

Busted: Diarrhoea can be caused by bacteria or viral infections, but this isn't always the case. It could be caused by lots of things, including stress, anxiety or menstruation. Diarrhoea can be a common symptom of some digestive conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), so if you're experiencing persistent diarrhoea for more than seven days, it's important to speak to your GP.

Top tip: If you're experiencing diarrhoea, it's important to stay hydrated to reduce the loss of essential water and nutrients. Drink plenty of water and try to eat a salty soup, paired with starchy carbs like crackers, pasta or rice. This can help the fluid and salt be absorbed into the body.

Myth #7: There's no link between the gut and brain

Busted: The gut-brain connection is real. They're physically connected through the vagus nerve and chemically connected through neurotransmitters. The two communicate with each other all the time, and what's going on in your gut can impact your mood, your sleep and more. 95% of serotonin, known as the happy hormone, is produced in the gut.

Myth #8: Exercise isn't necessary for my gut health

Busted: Studies show that people who are more physically active tend to have healthier guts, which supports good immune health and mental well-being. There's no one-size-fits-all when it comes to exercise – find movement you enjoy that you can fit into your day.

Top tip: Small habits add up. A brisk 10-minute walk after each meal can also support digestion and reduce digestive symptoms such as bloating or acid reflux.

Myth #9: I should do a gut microbiome test (poo-test)

Busted: Commercial microbiome tests – known as poo tests or gut bacteria tests – are available to buy, but they are not very useful, and they can be expensive. The data these tests provide isn't enough to base treatment on, so whilst it might be interesting to see what your poo has to say about your gut, that's about all they can do right now.

What's next?

The conversation doesn't stop here.

We want talking about our guts to become part of everyday conversation. We've all got them, after all. And the more comfortable we feel talking about them, the easier it is to get help and support when something isn't quite right.

There are plenty of ways to keep the conversation going, whether it's sharing a fibre-filled recipe with a family member to encourage them to increase their daily intake, sending a 'just checking in' text to someone you know is struggling so they feel less alone, or not shying away from telling someone that you're experiencing digestive symptoms.

Want to try more Let's Talk Guts downloadable resources?

Head to our website for more information on digestive symptoms, conditions and health and lifestyle at **gutscharity.org.uk/lets-talk-guts**.

Feeling inspired to get to know your own gut better?

Your poo is an indication of your health, so checking it regularly is a great place to start. Our Poo-Torial tool helps you to understand what the colour, consistency and frequency of your poo mean. Try it now at **gutscharity.org.uk/poo-torial**.

Help us spread the word!

Search for 'Guts Charity UK' on social media and use the hashtag #LetsTalkGuts to hear from people living with digestive conditions across the UK. Share a post about your Gut Together and encourage others to join the conversation too.

Need information and support?

Guts UK's Helpline provides information and support for more than 40 digestive conditions and symptoms. Go to **gutscharity.org.uk/helpline** to find out more.



#LetsTalkGuts

Thank you for joining the conversation.



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