

Let's Talk...



Bloating and Distension

What is bloating?

Bloating is that uncomfortable, tight, or full feeling inside your tummy. It can make your belly feel stretched and packed, often accompanied by a lot of trapped wind, gurgling or rumbling. It is a subjective sensation, meaning it is something you feel inside your gut, even if your gut doesn't look any different on the outside.

What is distension?

Distension is the physical, visible swelling of your tummy. Unlike bloating, distension is something you can see and measure. Your tummy expands outwardly, and your clothes might feel much tighter than they did earlier in the day. Many people find their distension worsens as the day goes on.

What causes bloating and distension?

They usually happen when a buildup of gas happens in your digestive system, or when your gut is particularly sensitive to normal amounts of gas.

Bloating and distension triggers include:

- Eating certain gas-producing foods
- Drinking fizzy drinks
- Eating too quickly
- Swallowing air
- Constipation
- Stress
- Hormonal changes

For many people, these symptoms clear up within a few hours to a couple of days.

Bloating and distension can make you feel self-conscious, physically uncomfortable or restricted. With much taboo still surrounding our guts, we understand why you might feel hesitant to talk about what's going on, but we're here to flush away the stigma.

Why? Because our guts and what they do are a crucial part of our health. The more you know about bloating and distension, the easier it can be to manage them and understand when they could be a sign of something more serious and need medical attention.

How should I treat

bloating and distension?

If you're experiencing short-term symptoms, they can usually be managed at home with some gentle adjustments, such as:

Eating habits

Try to eat smaller meals more regularly rather than large, heavy portions, and take your time to chew your food thoroughly. Avoid talking whilst eating to reduce the amount of air you swallow.

Food and drink

Keep a food diary to spot if certain foods, like beans, lentils, broccoli, onions or artificial sweeteners trigger your symptoms. Reducing fizzy drinks, alcohol and very fatty or spicy foods can also give your gut a break.

Movement

Gentle exercise is a great way to encourage gas to move through your gut. A short walk after eating or trying some simple yoga stretches, like bringing your knees to your chest when lying down, can work wonders for trapped wind.

Managing constipation

If your gut is backed up, gas can get trapped behind your poo, making bloating and distension much worse. Keeping your bowels regular can significantly reduce the pressure inside.

Medicine

Over-the-counter remedies like peppermint oil capsules or defoaming agents (like simethicone) are available from pharmacies without a prescription. Your pharmacist can help advise you on what might work best.



How can I avoid

bloating and distension?

One of the best ways to keep bloating and distension at bay is by taking care of your gut day-to-day:

- Maintain a calm, unhurried eating routine.
- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water, whilst limiting fizzy and caffeinated drinks.
- Gradually modify your diet if you notice specific triggers, ensuring you still get plenty of essential nutrients.
- Keep active to support the gut's natural movements.

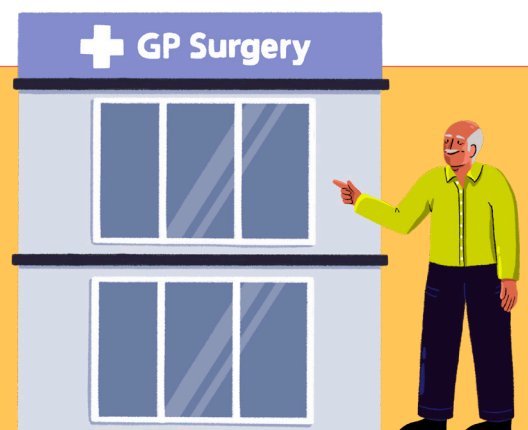
When should I seek medical advice?

If you've experienced frequent or constant bloating or distension for more than a few weeks, or if lifestyle changes aren't helping, it's important to seek medical advice.

You should also seek medical advice from your doctor or NHS 111 sooner if any of these apply:

- If you notice blood in your poo or bleeding from your bottom.
- If you have lost weight without meaning to.
- If you are experiencing severe, constant or worsening belly pain.
- If you feel a lump or swelling in your tummy.
- If you have an unexplained change in your bowel habits such as new, ongoing diarrhoea or constipation.
- If you are feeling constantly sick (nausea) or are vomiting.

Persistent bloating and distension can be a symptom of various digestive conditions, and in some cases, can point to non-digestive conditions that need checking out. You should always see your GP if your symptoms are persistent, as the underlying cause needs to be investigated.



How do I tell someone I have bloating and distension?

Telling your doctor

Your doctor is no stranger to talking about digestive symptoms, so be completely open and honest with them. Tell them how often you experience bloating, whether your tummy visibly swells (distension), if it gets worse throughout the day, and how it impacts your appetite and daily life. Having all the facts can help your doctor provide the right treatment and care.

Telling your employer

You might want to tell your employer if severe bloating or distension makes sitting at a desk or wearing your work uniform painful. If bloating and distension symptoms are part of an ongoing digestive condition, you might want to share this with your employer. This can help them offer you practical support and adjustments, such as taking breaks or adjustments to dress codes.

Telling your family and friends

If your tummy is feeling tender or your clothes feel tight because of bloating and distension, it can make you feel uncomfortable. Sharing how you're feeling with those around you can make a big difference. It's likely they'll have experienced a similar feeling themselves before and anyone who cares about you will meet you with kindness and reassurance.

How do I know what's normal for me?

Paying attention to how your body feels, as well as regularly checking your poo, are important steps to getting to know your normal and being able to spot when something changes. Your digestive patterns are unique to you, but your gut comfort can be an indicator of your overall health. If your symptoms change or persist, seek help.

For more information about bloating and distension, including causes, diagnosis, treatment and support, go to gutscharity.org.uk/symptoms/bloating-and-distension/.

Our online Poo-Torial tool can help you to better understand your digestive health by looking at the colour, consistency and frequency of your poo. Go to gutscharity.org.uk/poo-torial to try it now.



Guts UK is the national charity for the digestive system. We provide information and support on more than 40 digestive conditions and symptoms, as well as health and lifestyle. Go to gutscharity.org.uk/information to find out more. Need support? Contact our Helpline on **0300 102 4887** or gutscharity.org.uk/helpline.

Please note, this information is intended for people without a diagnosed digestive condition. If you live with a digestive condition and need information and support for bloating or distension, please speak to your healthcare team.

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