

Can You Stomach It?

How a better diet may help relieve and reverse digestive pain and symptoms

BY JACKSON A. THOMAS

Bloating. Constipation. Diarrhea. Heartburn. Stomach cramps. Many men are quite familiar with the misery of digestive issues.

“Men tend to have more GERD because their bodies produce more stomach acid, and the fact that men tend to store fat around their midsections aggravates the condition,” says Allison Stowell, a registered dietitian with the Guiding Stars nutrition guidance program in Scarborough, Maine. “In addition, anyone ... who eats very quickly or eats too much food at once will likely be more prone to digestive issues.”

But you can find relief from these common digestion dilemmas. Learn what foods may cause digestive pain and how it can be reversed with a better diet.

MEAL AND MED MISHAPS

Diets rich in saturated fats and low in fermentable fiber are the usual suspects of digestive woes, says Barry Sears, president of the nonprofit Inflammation Research Foundation in Peabody, Massachusetts. Wheat, rye, barley, oats, dairy, sugar and genetically modified foods are frequent culprits.

“The lack of fermentable fiber makes it likely that a leaky gut, as well as not supplying the necessary nutrients to make a wide variety of metabolites necessary for gut health, will develop. And the saturated fats make it easier for microbial fragments to enter the bloodstream to cause systematic inflammation,” Sears says.

Sometimes prescribed and over-the-counter medications may also negatively impact digestion or worsen symptoms, says registered dietitian Catherine Broihier of the Maine Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

“In some cases, digestive issues and stomach upset are a known side effect of a medication,” she says. “For example, taking lots of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory meds like ibuprofen are known to irritate the stomach lining and may lead to ulcers. ... Other medications can irritate the lining of the esophagus, thereby increasing potential for gastroesophageal reflux disease.”

UPSET RESPITE

To relieve digestion pain naturally, Sears says to eat more nonstarchy vegetables and limited amounts of fruits and add in some legumes for fermentable fiber.

“You get the greatest amount of fermentable fiber with the least number of calories by eating nonstarchy vegetables,” Sears says. “Adding fish oil is always a good idea to cause the elimina-

tion of oxygen in the gut that makes it more difficult for pathogenic microbes to get a foothold in the gut.”

Evan Chait, a nutritionist and co-founder of Kinetic PT in Ramsey, New Jersey, says to also eliminate toxic foods you simply can’t digest. “Some men are all or nothing, and others gradually reduce the toxic foods,” he says. “Do which is more comfortable for you. I would also start drinking half your body weight in ounces of water with a pinch of Celtic sea salt.”

Chait says it’s important for guys to stay proactive about digestive health because it’s “the cornerstone of total body health. When we have poor digestion, every organ system and joints become susceptible to injury, disease and pain.”

He adds: “A lot of men’s digestive problems actually affect the prostate, sexual drive and impotence, blood pressure, joint pain and abdominal distention. In other words, most ailments in men are caused by the gut. Fix the gut and most chronic ailments improve.”

REFLUX WOES

Some research has shown that more than **70 percent** Americans are living with digestive problems. More specifically, guys make up about **one in three** sufferers of irritable bowel syndrome, according to the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders. And a 2016 study from the Journal of Neurogastroenterology and Motility found that men suffer pathologic diseases such as reflux esophagitis and Barrett’s esophagus (a complication of heartburn and acid reflux disease) **more frequently** than women.