

WOMEN'S  
HEALTH



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# Beat the *bloat*

**W**ill you be struggling with the post-Christmas “jingle bowels”? The average adult in the UK consumes more than 6,000 calories on Christmas Day alone and it’s not rocket science to know that eating and drinking our body weight in tasty treats will leave us feeling sluggish and bloated.

The festive period runs throughout December and into early January and is a “season” of indulgence, meaning many of us begin the New Year with regret and a panic-driven resolution of fad diets. But the festivities should be a time to

relax and socialise and with that comes great food and drink, so why should we feel guilty for having enjoyed ourselves?

Obviously, it would have been better to prevent the symptoms in the first place but if you find yourself on the other side nursing some unpleasant gut symptoms, here are my tips to beat the bloat...

#### HAPPY MIND, HAPPY GUT

Our digestive system is particularly susceptible to stress and our mood can greatly influence gut activity as there is a strong link with the brain.

When we are stressed or have a low mood our body produces fewer digestive

enzymes, increasing the likelihood of indigestion and bloating.

Investing time in relaxation techniques such as yoga, massage, or mindfulness, can help ease stress and worry.

You do not need to spend lots of money, you could try doing some meditation or breathing exercises at home. There are lots of free online classes and Apps such as Calm and Headspace.

#### LET YOUR GUT REST

It takes energy for your gut to digest food. Like anything working hard, it also needs to rest so it’s important to

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allow time between meals. There's mixed evidence on the benefits of fasting but allowing maximum time for the gut to rest overnight can help. This includes not eating late at night before bedtime.

The type of foods we eat can make a huge difference. It takes more energy to digest certain food groups including red meat, high fat dairy and processed and sugary foods.

This can lead to reduced motility and sluggish bowels, resulting in a whole host of issues such as bloating, constipation, lethargy and sleep and mood issues.

These foods, along with drinks such as alcohol and caffeine, can also cause gut inflammation and put a burden on the liver, which has a close relationship with the gut to remove toxins from the body.

If our digestive tract is inflamed and full of toxins, we can suffer from water retention, not to mention long-term health conditions such as liver disease. Having a regular, balanced Mediterranean-style diet will take the strain off your gut while drinking plenty of water will keep you well hydrated, flush out toxins and help reduce constipation.

#### DITCH THE FIZZ

Adding air and bubbles into the gut inevitably leads to feeling gassy and bloated. Fizzy drinks and certain foods, like cabbages, are particular triggers.

If this is a concern for you, dodging these gassy gastronomies will help reduce your symptoms.

#### CHEW YOUR FOOD

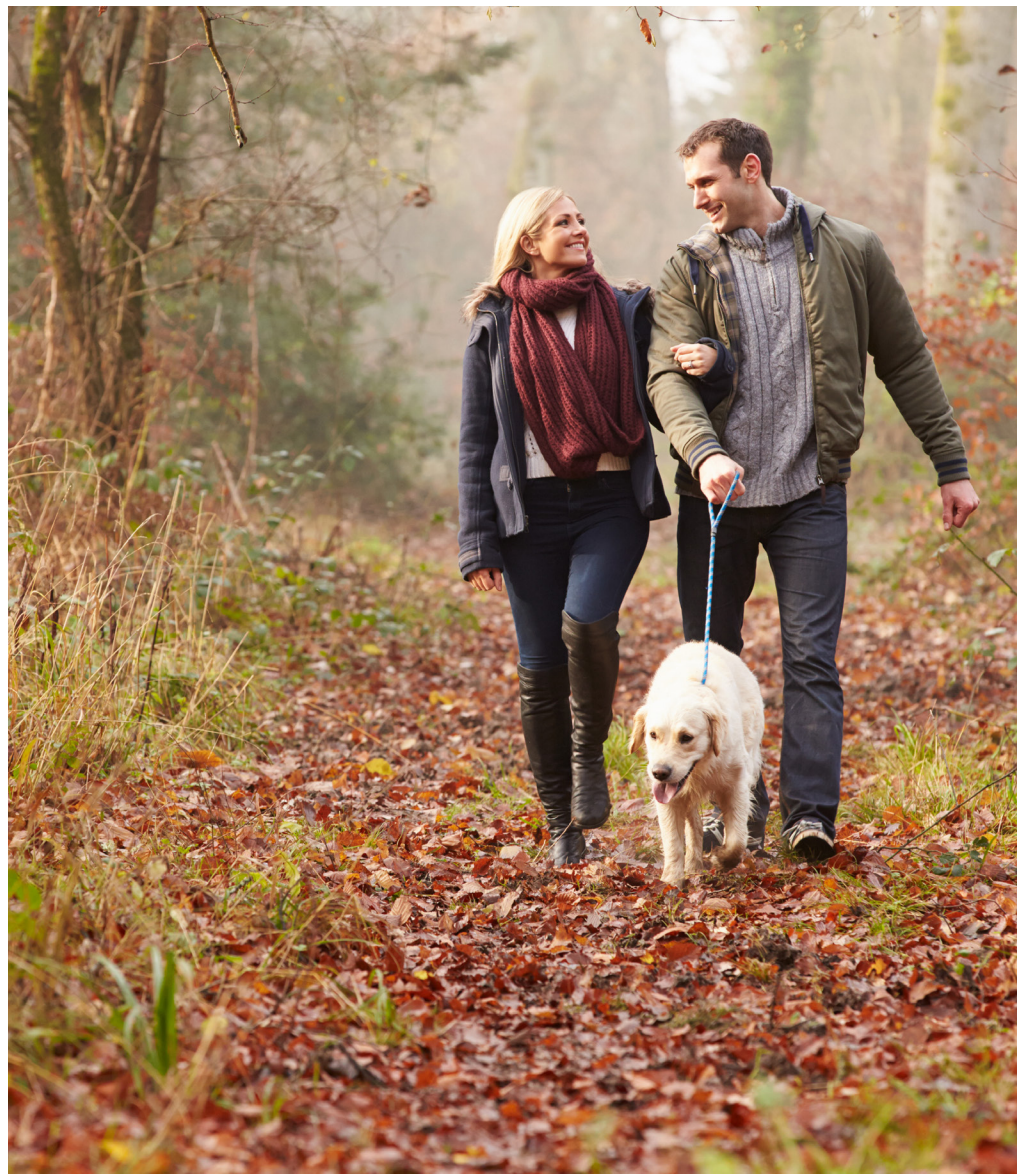
It may sound obvious but chewing each bite slowly not only burns calories but helps create lots of saliva in the mouth, releasing digestive enzymes to break down food.

If we eat large meals or gulp food quickly, the digestive system struggles to break all the food down, leading to bloating, indigestion and reflux.

If you are already prone to these, you may benefit from chewing foods that increase digestive enzymes, such as ginger and lemon. You could also try adding these to warm drinking water for similar benefits.

#### TRY PROBIOTICS

Probiotics are strains of live microbes that live in the gut. Certain strains are especially good for our gut as they produce enzymes to break down hard-to-digest starches and sugars. They are



found in fermented foods such as kimchi, sauerkraut, live yoghurt and kefir.

You can buy probiotic supplements but you need the right amount and type of microbes to feel the benefits, so do your research before investing.

Prebiotics also play their part, helping the good bacteria to grow and stay alive. These are in foods high in polyphenol, such as broccoli, flax, berries and onions.

#### HUG A HOT WATER BOTTLE

Warmth will relax your gut muscles, allowing any trapped gas to move through your intestines.

#### GET MOVING

It's hard to be motivated to exercise when we feel sluggish but every little counts, even if it's a gentle walk and not sitting for long periods. Moving and exercise encourages digestion.

Abdominal massage can also help to ease digestive discomfort as the pressure

and downward motion will encourage gas release and help reduce constipation.

#### REMAIN VIGILANT

Bloating is a common symptom associated with the effects of indulgence but if you have persistent or chronic bloating, especially coupled with other symptoms such as change in bowel habit, abnormal vaginal or rectal bleeding, or extreme unexpected changes to your weight, contact your doctor to rule out other causes.

Hopefully, following these tips will ease you into the new year with a happy, healthy gut. Happy New Year everyone.

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