



Tummy talk What's your gut feeling?

From headaches to heartburn, your digestive system has some uncomfortable methods of communication. **Louise Pyne** translates your body language

At around 20 feet long, your gastrointestinal tract plays a crucial role in your health. This massive system is responsible for digesting food, absorbing nutrients and eliminating waste products, but it's also known as the body's second brain because of its complex connection with your grey matter. It's vital to keep your digestive system working properly, but astoundingly, more than 40 per cent of us suffer from at least one digestive problem at any time.

From burping to bloating, excess gas to gastric pain, we all know the telltale signs, but most of us don't explore the root of the problem. And then there's the symptoms that don't have any obvious link to digestion, such as headaches and tiredness. Follow our good gut guide to get your gastrointestinal health back in order.

If you suffer from bloating

It could be... A yeast imbalance

Bloated, bubbling tum? An imbalance of good gut flora (the protective bacteria that lines our digestive tract) is one of the most common problems when it comes to gastro health and is largely down to poor diet. 'This is caused by food fermenting instead of being digested,' says nutrition expert Marisa Peer (www.marisapeer.com). 'Yeasts ferment sugars into alcohol, which destabilises blood sugar and causes strong sugar cravings.'

Tummy soothers: To boost your tummy's good bacteria you'll need to cut out the number-one baddie here – sugar. Aside from the obvious sugary treats, keep an eye on hidden forms found in fruit, juice, pre-made sauces and fermented foods including vinegar, wine and soya sauce. Instead, load up on wholegrains, fresh veg, lean protein and 'good' fats and take a probiotic supplement such as **Bio-Kult Probiotic Multi-Strain Formula, £8.99, www.bio-kult.com**. It's also important to chew your food thoroughly.

If stress plays havoc with your tummy

It could be... Irritable bowel syndrome

Excess gas, abdominal pain and recurrent bouts of constipation and diarrhoea are all common symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). 'The symptoms of IBS are usually triggered after eating certain foods, such as wheat or dairy, but can also flare up due to stress and nerves,' explains Marisa.

Tummy soothers: Avoid gluten in foods such as bread and pasta, and inflammatory ingredients like sugar, alcohol and caffeine. Try de-stressing techniques such as deep breathing, meditation and yoga to help you cope with stressful situations, and if you think you may suffer from IBS, it's worth seeking further advice from your GP.

'The massive digestive system is also known as the body's second brain because of its complex connection with your grey matter'

If eating gives you a burning sensation

It could be... Indigestion

Experiencing a tight or burning sensation in your chest and a bitter taste in your throat are common symptoms of indigestion. However, contrary to popular belief, indigestion is thought to be caused by low levels of stomach acid, rather than too much acid, so antacids might be more harmful than helpful here.

Tummy soothers: Eat a little less, Marisa tips.

'Avoid large meals, because a full stomach can put extra pressure on the lower oesophageal sphincter (the tube connecting the throat to the stomach),' says Marisa. Try to avoid wearing tight fitting clothes before eating and consider taking a digestive enzyme supplement such as **Udo's Choice Ultimate Digestive Enzyme Blend, £18.99, www.udoschoice.co.uk**.

If you have recurring migraines

It could be... A food intolerance

Unlike food allergies, which tend to show symptoms immediately, food intolerance symptoms such as migraines can appear up to 24 hours after eating. Some of the typical aggravators include gluten, dairy and nuts. 'Dairy produces histamine, and histamine is a trigger for migraines. Other foods like spices and red wine can also set off histamine, resulting in migraines,' says Marisa.

Tummy soothers: Try eliminating the food you think may be the culprit for at least 28 days, and keep a food diary to monitor whether symptoms improve. After 28 days slowly re-introduce the possible problematic food, eating it once a week to see if symptoms have subsided.

If you're constantly tired

It could be... A compromised immunity

The food we eat provides the building blocks for all our cells, but faulty digestion can impair your nutrient absorption, meaning you're not getting the correct balance of nutrients for energy production. 'There are more enzymes in the mouth than there are in the stomach, so if you don't chew your food properly you won't digest it and without the energy and nutrients in food you will feel fatigue,' explains Marisa.

The vast majority of your immune cells are located in your gut, so it's no surprise that your energy levels tend to suffer if your gut health is under par.

Tummy soothers: Swap all processed foods including any cakes, biscuits and ready meals for wholegrain options such as brown rice, lots of dark green leafy vegetables, good quality protein and fat. Eat little and often and combine protein and carbs with each meal to keep your energy levels stable.



LACKING ENERGY?
YOUR GUT COULD
HOLD THE ANSWER