

# How you eat might be affecting your gut health



In this hectic world, most of us struggle to find downtime. Chomping down our lunch, sitting at our desk, replying to emails whilst also on the phone trying to get a doctor's appointment all sounds far too familiar.

Many of us feel bad for relaxing, and feel that if we aren't doing multiple things at once, we are simply being lazy. However, this constant stress all has an impact on our gut health. The more we go back to back, never switching off, the worse our digestion and gut symptoms may become – bloating, indigestion, volatile hunger and even loose bowels.

Even if you do eat super well, have you ever taken a step back to think that your issues could be down to *how* you're eating, rather than what you are eating?

Here are eight tips to increase your enjoyment of meals and alter the way in which you eat, enhancing a more comfortable and effective digestion and increasing energy levels to face whatever life throws at you.

## 1 Chew your food

Digestion begins in the mouth! When you chew your food properly, you release saliva that contains digestive enzymes that help to break down your food. Missing this crucial step can lead to bloating and indigestion. Start by focusing on chewing your food more effectively. Ideally you should chew until each mouthful is the consistency of apple puree.

## 2 Avoid eating on the go

Eating on the go can lead to overeating, indigestion and potentially bloating. When we are on the move, our bodies are in a sympathetic state i.e. fight or flight, which can reduce digestive processes. We ideally should be eating when we are in our parasympathetic state, i.e. rest and digest, so our body is primed and ready to receive and digest food.

It has been [suggested](#) that eating on the go may lead to overeating later on in the day, which can put further pressure on our digestive systems.

## 3 Aim for regular meal times

If we stick to a schedule of regular meal times, we are less likely to snack, graze and overeat. Snacking and grazing can impact the MMC (migrating motor complex) which works to help clear out the intestines and keep our bowel movements regular. Stick to regular meals and aim to have a gap of 3-4 hours between eating intervals.

## 4 Avoid drinking whilst eating

Drinking may trigger reflux or heartburn for those who are sensitive to those symptoms. This is down to the fact that more liquid in the stomach can delay emptying of food and cause more pressure, triggering acid to be released into the esophagus and throat.

### About the author

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### About WPA

WPA is a specialist not-for-profit health insurer. With a history dating back to 1901 they look after private individuals, families and all businesses from micro enterprises through to blue chip global brands.

## 5 Avoid eating when stressed

When we are in a state of stress, we may experience gastro changes such as lowered/increased appetite, bloating and loose bowel movements.

This is partly thanks to the fact that the areas of the brain that control anxiety or depression also receive nerves that control gut function.

If you feel stressed around meal times, take a few deep breaths before eating. Deep breathing can help to calm the vagus nerve which controls many of the signals between the gut and the brain.

## 6 Eat mindfully

Eating in front of technology – scrolling through our smartphones or watching TV distracts us from focusing on our food and eating well. Our brain registers when we are about to eat, and prompts the digestive process. This initial stage of digestion stimulates around 20% of digestive secretions needed to digest a meal, so when we are more focussed on other things rather than the meal we are consuming, this cephalic stage is affected which can result in bloating.

Try mindful eating – switch off the TV, put your phone away and honour your food by savouring the textures, smells and flavours.

## 7 Eat slowly

It can take between 10-20 minutes for our stomach to send signals to the brain to tell us we are full and satiated. If we are eating slowly, we are less likely to miss these cues and overeat. Overloading your digestive system with too much undigested food can take its toll on your gut and overall health, as your body has to focus on breaking down this undigested food, rather than other bodily functions and processes.

A great tip is to put your fork and knife down between each bite and aim for anywhere between 10-20 minutes to eat your meal.

## 8 Eat upright

As tempting as eating whilst reclined might be, gravity can lend its helping hand when we are digesting our food. When we lie down whilst eating or straight after a meal, this can actually trigger slower emptying of the stomach which may trigger reflux or indigestion. Avoid lying flat after a heavy meal and sit upright if you notice any uncomfortable feelings.

Overall, chewing every bite of food 30 times for the foreseeable may seem unrealistic, but making small changes to your eating habits may result in big wins when it comes to the way in which you feel. Savour every mouthful of food, and most importantly, enjoy it.