

# How to Prevent Bloating

**T**wo-thirds of people report suffering from bloating. In the Holford 100% Health Survey of over 55,000 people, 65 per cent reported frequently or occasionally experiencing bloating, and 59 per cent reported flatulence. There are two main causes of bloating: one is gas and the other is water.

I remember my first client who, on eliminating their food intolerances, lost 3.2kg/7lb in two days. Now, I thought, that cannot be fat loss. To lose 1kg/2lb of fat in a week is good going. You have to be cutting down calories, eating a low-GL diet and exercising. More than two-thirds of your body is made up of water, and the body can sometimes retain too much, creating unnecessary weight gain. This can be a consequence of poor kidney function, hormonal imbalances and too much sugar. The body stores excess sugar as glycogen, each unit of which is bound to four units of water. In addition, one very common cause of waterlogging is food intolerance. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does your face look puffy, especially around the eyes?
2. Does your abdomen, on pressing, feel bloated?
3. Do your arms or thighs feel puffy rather than being pure fat and muscle?
4. Do your ankles ever swell up?
5. Do your fingers ever swell up so that it's hard to get your rings off?
6. Do you have dry skin or dandruff?
7. Do you ever experience sudden fluctuations in your weight?
8. Do you suffer from breast tenderness?
9. Are you prone to allergies or intolerances?

If you answered yes to three or more of the questions above, the chances are that water retention is partly to blame for your weight problem.

## The role of food intolerances and water retention

As I have explained earlier, if an unwanted substance (such as an indigested protein) passes across the wall of your digestive tract and into the bloodstream, your immune system reacts. But why does it lead to water retention and weight gain? The reason is twofold. First, histamine release, which is what makes you sneeze if you have hay fever, makes tiny blood vessels, called capillaries, more leaky. This allows the immune system's army of white blood cells to move into the battlefield. At the same time, more fluid passes into your tissues. If this is happening several times a day, you become waterlogged. Immune reactions also mess up the balance of

prostaglandins – the hormone-like substances made from essential fats – and this too can lead to water retention, as well as abdominal bloating. Food intolerances and allergies cause the release of histamine and other inflammatory molecules.

This is not the only mechanism that might link food intolerances to weight gain. When your immune system is frequently reacting to the foods you eat, you develop a background of chronic inflammation and that, in turn, can impair the brain's ability to receive the appetite-suppressant leptin's messages (this is called leptin resistance),<sup>67</sup> so you keep eating. Removing foods from the diet that are provoking the inflammation can help undo the damage, reducing weight and moderating appetite.

That's the theory, but where is the proof? YorkTest, Britain's most advanced and science-led food intolerance laboratory, recently surveyed 38 individuals who had taken a food-specific IgG test and who had reported weight loss after making dietary changes according to the test results. According to Dr Gill Hart, the scientific director, however: 'Only 13 per cent stated that weight loss was the primary reason for using the programme. Other primary reasons for using the programme included digestive symptoms such as IBS and bloating (47 per cent), skin symptoms such as eczema and rashes (11 per cent), migraines (2.5 per cent), fatigue (2.5 per cent), and other (24 per cent). Half said that they were concerned about their weight before they took the test. One in four (26 per cent) noticed a reduction in weight within a week. A further 26 per cent said they lost weight between 1 and 2 weeks, 31 per cent between 2 and 4 weeks, and 17 per cent took more than 4 weeks. The majority (92 per cent) said that the weight loss that they achieved was desirable. Fourteen per cent lost up to 5lb, 34 per cent lost between 6 and 10lb, 26 per cent lost between 11 and 15lb, 17 per cent

lost between 16 and 20lb and 9 per cent lost over 20lb in weight over a greater than 3 month period by avoiding their intolerant foods, identified by YorkTest's Food and Drink Scan Programme. Not only that, their weight loss was sustained and often manageable for the first time.'

The most common kind of immune reaction to foods isn't a food allergy (an IgE-mediated immune response) but a food intolerance, which leads to the production of IgG antibodies. These induce an IgG immune reaction when the trigger foods are eaten. As we have seen, the symptoms can often be a delayed reaction, making it difficult to identify the offending foods. They also cause fluid retention.

The YorkTest findings are completely consistent with a previously published study in the US, which reported an average 5.4kg/12lb weight loss after 60 days in a group of 120 people tested for and avoiding their IgG-positive foods using Immuno Laboratory's test.<sup>68</sup> They also had desirable reductions in waist and hip circumferences, blood pressure and quality-of-life indicators.

The more foods you eat that provoke an IgG antibody reaction, the worse it is for your health and your weight. Your immune system is not designed to produce large amounts of IgG antibodies. If it does, you are likely to suffer from some degree of discomfort and symptoms that just don't seem to improve, as well as being resistant to weight loss. If you suspect that you may have reactions to foods, I recommend that you investigate further by having a IgG food intolerance test, which you can do with a simple home test kit (see Resources). The results are sent to you, showing you exactly which foods your immune system is reacting against. Also, unlike the classic IgE-mediated food allergy, IgG sensitivities don't always last for life. These sensitivities often disappear after a few months if you stop eating your offending foods and at

the same time improve your diet and take supplements containing digestive enzymes, glutamine and probiotics to keep your gut healthy.

### Case Study: Cathy

Cathy took a food intolerance test after suffering with prolonged digestive problems. The constipation, wind and bloating she was experiencing were all classic symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). So severe was her condition that she frequently had to visit the hospital. The tests she underwent could not identify the root cause of the problem, and the medication she was prescribed only made her feel worse. Not only were her symptoms uncomfortable and at times painful, but they also caused her great embarrassment.

‘When I say I was “bloated” it doesn’t really do justice to my symptoms. I was carrying so much fluid that I felt constantly swollen. I was asked on a regular basis if I was pregnant and when was I due. It was terribly upsetting and humiliating, and to add to the problem my weight started going up even though I had never had a problem with my weight in the past. I felt very down and depressed, and I suffered with low esteem, so for two years I didn’t go out and couldn’t socialise. I hated looking in the mirror, and I had a very poor image of myself.’

After struggling with the combination of her weight gain, poor health and the negative impact on her mood, Cathy decided to try a different route to get to the cause of her problems.

‘One day my mum suggested that I take a food intolerance test to see if that could help with my symptoms. I decided to give it a go as I hadn’t had any luck through doctors and the hospital.’

When she received her results, Cathy learnt she was reacting to egg white, egg yolk and, surprisingly, peas. To better understand the changes she needed to make to her diet and to ensure that she replaced her trigger foods with nutritious alternatives, she booked a consultation with a nutritional therapist, who talked her through the results and helped her to plan delicious, satisfying meals.

‘I immediately took eggs out of my diet and replaced them with porridge for breakfast, and the effect was almost immediate. I instantly felt like I had more energy, and after a couple of weeks my swollen stomach went flat for the first time in years!’

Now, armed with the knowledge of her food intolerance and supported by the advice of her nutritional therapist, Cathy has been able to manage her health and weight and is looking forward to a bright future.

‘With my new increased energy levels I am able to go to the gym more, and my weight has come down from 10 stone 2 pounds to 7 stone 11 pounds in 7 months. My depression has totally lifted and my whole attitude to food and life has changed. I am delighted to see my body changing and my new shape. My confidence levels have soared and I couldn’t be happier.’

## The causes of wind

The digestive tract usually contains about 200ml of gas, and it is not abnormal to pass 400–2,000ml of this daily. About 90 per cent of the gas is made up of nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide, methane and hydrogen. The nitrogen and oxygen come from air that is swallowed; the carbon dioxide is produced when stomach acid mixes with bicarbonates in bile and pancreatic juices. Most of the oxygen and carbon dioxide are reabsorbed into the bloodstream through the small intestine. As we have seen, the colon, or large bowel, contains billions of bacteria, which are essential for good health and whose job it is to ferment products that pass from the small intestine. As the bacteria ferment, the residues, large amounts of hydrogen, methane, carbon dioxide and other gases are produced. Although some of these are reabsorbed into the blood and excreted in the breath, the rest is passed as wind.

One of the major causes of excessive wind is dysbiosis and indigestion (see Chapters 14 and 17). If food is not completely broken down, this provides microorganisms in the digestive tract with more ‘food’ – hence more gas. The first step to solving this problem is to change your diet and to supplement digestive enzymes with each meal (see Chapter 2). Certain foods do generate more gas, including beans and some vegetables such as cabbage, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, turnips, leeks, onions and garlic.

## Poor digestion and dysbiosis

Although food intolerance is a common cause of bloating, some people just aren’t good at digesting certain foods and

they consequently bloat. The effect can be almost immediate, within less than an hour of eating the food. The logical explanation is that if the digestive system doesn't digest the food adequately, the bacteria in the guts will feed on it, producing gas and hence bloating. This may or may not be the true and only explanation for sudden bloating, but I have had many patients who have experienced almost immediate relief from taking digestive enzymes. It might be that their body is already 'primed' by virtue of having a degree of dysbiosis and an unhealthy balance of bacteria waiting to pounce on undigested food. An overgrowth of bacteria in the small intestine is a likely candidate for contributing to bloating, as in an overgrowth of the *Candida albicans* yeast (see Chapter 24). I discuss this as a cause of irritable bowel syndrome in the next chapter.

The most common offending foods for wind are beans, lentils and other pulses, which require alpha-galactosidase for their digestion; and greens, especially cruciferous vegetables (cabbage, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower), which require amyloglucosidase (also called glucoamylase). Certain others generate more gas, including turnips, leeks, onions and garlic. Beans, onions and garlic are also high in resistant starch. Some people who have difficulties with these foods do well on a low-FODMAP diet (see page 241), which eliminates resistant starches. Other people are intolerant to the sugar in milk, lactose, and bloat unless they supplement the enzyme lactase.

If you bloat after these foods, you might also like to try taking a digestive enzyme containing alpha-galactosidase and amyloglucosidase, plus the basics for digesting protein (protease), carbohydrate (amylase) and fat (lipase). Some enzyme supplements include probiotics, which is not a bad idea in any case. Read Chapter 2 for more on digestive enzymes.

## Check your hormones

Although the effect is not immediate, if you are prone to bloating and/or water retention, one possible contributor is hormone imbalance. Oestrogen dominance – relatively more oestrogen than progesterone – is extremely common in women in the peri- and menopausal years. This is due to anovulatory cycles, because progesterone is only produced if ovulation has occurred. Oestrogen is also produced in fat cells, so this is more likely in overweight women. This can trigger more water and sodium to enter the cells, thereby causing water retention and often an increase in blood pressure. If you do have a lack of progesterone, correcting this can lead to a reduction in bloating and water retention with its consequent weight loss.

### Summary – Chapter 22

If you often experience bloating:

- Quit sugar and follow a low-GL diet.
- Rule out kidney problems if you have the symptoms of excessive water retention.
- Find out if you have any food intolerances, and eliminate them.
- Have a trial period taking digestive enzymes with probiotics with each main meal to find out whether you are struggling to digest certain foods.

Extract from *Improve Your Digestion* by Patrick Holford (Piatkus), used with permission.

