

Prevention of Indigestion and Bloating at Christmas



Eat, drink and be merry at Christmas time without indigestion and bloating.

Because an average Christmas Day meal is often much richer than what we normally consume (it can be thousands of calories more than normal!), it is no wonder that our whole system gets out of kilter with indigestion, heartburn, bloating and the other significant discomfort and embarrassment of wind.

In addition to the general discomfort of the overfull tummy and too many glasses of alcohol, a rich Xmas meal can actually leave feeling very fatigued and sluggish, exaggerating the hangover effect. In extreme cases people not only feel nausea but can actually vomit. Diarrhoea is another nasty side effect of overdoing it at Christmas.

What foods cause our systems the most upset?

1. The traditional turkey is often served with rich and spicy sauces.
2. Sometimes the way the ham is cured is a problem.
3. Mincemeat tarts can cause bloating and indigestion because of the fruit and pastry combination.
4. Plum pudding at the end of the meal adds to the overload of rich food
5. Nibbles, nuts, candied fruits add to the richness and overeating

And then there is the alcohol! A mixture of bubbly, still wine and beer or spirits over a long period of time often means that suddenly our digestion cannot cope.

How can we still have a good time but avoid digestive problems?

If you are prone to indigestion, bloating and heartburn then taking some simple preventative steps will make a big difference.

1. Start the day with a good breakfast. If you think you will be having a few drinks throughout the day, then try to have a high fibre breakfast that also contains some fat - porridge with whole milk or poached egg on wholegrain toast are good examples. These foods are not digested quickly and soak up acid due to the amount of time spent in the stomach. They are also good for preventing alcohol being absorbed into the blood stream too quickly.
2. Take it easy with what you are putting in your mouth and pace yourself throughout the day. If you feel at any time you've taken too much, don't be afraid to say so and ask for a soft drink instead. Christmas is about having a good time, not getting drunk before you've even seen the turkey!
3. Chew properly and slowly. This not only prevents indigestion but helps to prevent bloating as well. Bloating is an excess of tiny gas bubbles needed to digest properly. Alcohol, fizzy drinks, beans, cauliflower and onions are a few of the main culprits. In addition, talking and drinking too much while eating also leads to bloating.
4. Take 1 spoon of apple cider vinegar in water or apple juice before the main meal. This increases the hydrochloric acid in the stomach and helps to break the food down.
5. If you're prone to heartburn then avoid fizzy and cold drinks that tend to stimulate acid and cause wind.
6. Drinking alcohol on an empty stomach can lead to excess acid as well as nausea, so try and eat something light if you're having alcohol before a meal - snacks help to soak up the alcohol.
7. Try to avoid stress or tension as this can interfere hugely with digesting your meal. If family arguments are a problem, know to go easy on the alcohol and the food.

Possible cures for gut problems

Sometimes because we are having a good time, we forget all these points and end up with bloating, wind, indigestion or heartburn.

In that case:

1. Ginger is good for nausea - and chamomile tea can help an upset stomach as well as helping with digestive cramps and bloating. Some people also find peppermint good for this.
2. Cinnamon - ground cinnamon can be made up with water and honey as a home remedy to help the digestive tract recover from excess food and drink. You simply add one tablespoon of the cinnamon to a cup of boiling water and add honey to improve the taste.

3. You can also use crushed coriander seeds and make up a drink in the same way as the cinnamon.

4. Pineapple juice not only tastes wonderful but it is also very good for gastric upsets such as indigestion. Pineapple juice contains a substance called bromelain and can also be taken before meals as a preventative measure against indigestion.

5. Finally my favourite cure is 1 spoon of bicarbonate of soda in water. It relieves the feeling of discomfort and fullness because it acts as an antacid. However use it as a one off treatment rather than often because it decreases the digestive effect of the hydrochloric acid in your stomach.

Hope these tips help for a day that should be so special. Yes, we can enjoy the food and drink on offer - it's simply a case of taking it easy and listening when our stomachs tell us that it's had enough.

Merry Christmas and all the best for the holiday season!