

Trust your gut!

There's a lot more going on in your mid-section than you probably know. The micro-organisms that live inside your stomach and intestines help your body to digest foods, assist your immune system, synthesize serotonin, eliminate waste, and produce vitamins K, B-12 and biotin. Therefore, it's important to keep your gut in check.

If your stomach is feeling off, there's a good chance you have an imbalance of good and bad bacteria in your gut. Here are some common stomach symptoms and possible explanations:

- **Food cravings.** We're not talking about your daily afternoon candy dish raid. Craving foods, especially sugary sweets, might be an indication of an overgrowth in yeast in your stomach, which can happen after a round of antibiotics.
- **Anxious or sad feelings.** About 85% of serotonin is produced in the stomach. A decrease in serotonin levels can trigger depressive symptoms and sleepless nights.
- **Your stomach just doesn't feel good.** Chronic discomfort, bloating, nausea and heartburn are obvious symptoms that something isn't right.

If you are experiencing one or more of these symptoms, small changes in your diet and daily activity can adjust the levels of good and bad bacteria in your stomach in as little as 24 hours. You may want to try some of these tips:

- Consider adding fermented foods into your diet. For example, yogurt, kombucha, and kefir are natural sources of healthy bacteria, also known as probiotics.
- Swap out processed foods for whole foods like fresh vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds.
- Add in some prebiotic foods that help to feed the good bacteria in your body, such as bananas, garlic, quinoa and pistachios.
- If you smoke, here's yet another reason to stop. Smoking has been linked to peptic ulcers and heartburn. It can also increase your chance of developing gallstones.
- Get moving. Excess weight can put extra pressure on the stomach. This can contribute to heartburn, constipation and ulcers.
- Stop over-sanitizing. We are in the habit of sanitizing everything these days. Antibacterial soaps, gels, sprays and wipes remove not only the harmful bacteria, but the good bacteria as well, leaving us more vulnerable to disease and infection.
- If you are experiencing any symptoms for more than a few days, contact your doctor. Chronic stomach symptoms could be an indicator of pancreatitis, ulcer, irritable bowel syndrome or other serious health conditions.

Make sure you always listen to your gut. After all, it may be trying to tell you something!