What’s your gut feeling?

Are you one of the millions of people in the UK suffering from digestive problems?

Feeling nervous or embarrassed, and unsure where to turn for help?

Or do you just want to learn more about how to keep your gut healthy?

Then Love Your Gut is here to help!

Check your current digestive health with our simple, confidential 3-minute questionnaire – and then read on for simple, practical advice and tips.

Improving your gut health really can be easier than you think.

Start today!

Love Your Gut is an initiative of Core and the IBS Network, supported by Yakult UK Limited. Neither Core nor the IBS Network endorses any specific commercial or pharmaceutical products.
The Gut

The digestive system (or ‘gut’) is responsible for processing the food we eat, so that essential nutrients, vitamins and minerals can be absorbed, providing vital fuel for our body. Most of the time it works remarkably well considering the variety of foods that we put into it – but if, for example, we are stressed; if we eat too much of any component of our diet, then it may ‘complain’ and we may develop gut symptoms. And just occasionally, these symptoms can be the sign of a medical disease involving the gut. So understanding how the digestive system works and how to look after it is important.

And have you ever thought about how expressive your gut is?

You can actually use all five senses to understand how well your gut is working. So by looking, listening, smelling, tasting and feeling you may be able to recognise warning signs sooner than you think:

**Sound** – Not eaten for a while? Those rumbles could be your gut looking forward to the next meal by contracting and moving its contents on. Rumbling in the tummy (‘borborygmi’) is also about emotion and can be a giveaway when somebody is thinking about something they don’t want to talk about.

**Taste** – Sufferers of acid reflux may experience a sour taste in the mouth caused by regurgitated stomach acid. A metallic taste in the mouth may occur in women at the start of pregnancy, people with bleeding gums, patients taking antibiotics or those with a deficiency of zinc or vitamin B12. Loosely fitting crowns, gingivitis and constipation can all cause a bad taste in the mouth.

**Sight** – Stools towards the sloppy, loose, pale end of the spectrum often indicate that food is passing through the bowel very quickly and is incompletely absorbed, whereas hard, pellet-like, dark stools can indicate hold-up and intestinal spasm. Abdominal distension may well be caused by a combination of eating a diet containing a lot of poorly-absorbed fermentable sugars (FODMAPs – fruit, veg, and in some people, milk etc) and spasm/hold up.

**Feeling** – Crampy abdominal pains are often caused by eating too much of the wrong food. Excess fruit, fat or coffee can cause cramping, particularly in patients with the sensitive bowels of IBS. Severe persistent cramping might rarely indicate a partial obstruction of the intestine, caused for example by Crohn’s disease, or obstruction of the bile duct by a gallstone.

**Smell** – Men and women both have smelly wind – it relates to what you’ve eaten and the composition of your bacterial flora. Diets rich in protein (sulphur containing amino acids) tend to pass wind with an odour similar to rotten eggs.

For more information, including a detailed description of each of the organs of the digestive system, please visit www.loveyourgut.com.
Good Gut Health

Looking after your gut is easier than you might think. Take a look at the top tips from our experts below – and visit www.loveyourgut.com for more information.

Diet and Mealtimes

Nutritional therapist *Melanie Flower* offers top tips on eating for digestive health:

**Be prepared.** The smell of food sends nervous signals from the brain to the gut, causing digestive enzymes to be produced. Cook meals from scratch and the smell of food will prepare the digestive system for what’s to come.

**Chew your food.** Chewing mixes food with saliva, which starts to break down starches. If food is poorly chewed, stomach enzymes and acid in the stomach have to work harder to break it down, which can cause bloating and heartburn.

**Know your limit.** Continuing to eat past the point when you are comfortably full can overload your digestive system with extra food that it will struggle to process. Overeating can cause symptoms of indigestion, including bloating and wind.

Exercise

Personal trainer *Sophie Christy* offers tips and motivation for easy exercise:

**Varying your exercise provides different health benefits.** Combine anaerobic exercise such as weight-bearing exercises with aerobic activities such as housework or walking. And flexibility exercises such as yoga and Pilates are great at keeping you supple.

**Modify your everyday routine in order to incorporate more exercise:** walk to the shops or friends’ houses instead of driving, and use stairs instead of escalators. Challenge yourself when doing the housework: can you vacuum more quickly, or polish more vigorously?

**Walking every day can really boost your fitness routine.** But are you getting around enough? Experts recommend taking 10,000 steps a day to avoid leading a sedentary lifestyle, so invest in a pedometer, which will measure the number of steps you take.

**Thirty minutes of exercise, five times a week can seem a little daunting.** But thirty minutes only actually equates to 3% of your day - now is that so hard to fit in? It doesn’t need to be the same time or activity every day, but do try and fit the time in - even doing something is better than nothing at all.

Lifestyle

Gastroenterologist and psychotherapist *Dr. Nick Read* shares tips on coping with stress:

**In stressful situations,** adrenalin pumping around the body and the compensatory effects of cortisol can alter the transit of food through the gut, causing either constipation or diarrhoea. Make an effort to consciously de-stress by taking time out to relax. Breathe deeply and feel the tension leave your body.

**Lead a balanced life.** If you can regulate your life, then you will regulate your bowels as well. Take time off - listen to music, take a long bath, read a book, meet friends or go for a stroll.

**Plan ahead.** Don’t let the hectic nature of modern life overwhelm you. Buy a diary and plan your work so that it fits with your home life and social activities. Staying in control can help you to feel calmer about everything.

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The Digestive Health Assessment

For most of us, abdominal symptoms may just be warning signs that we are doing too much, things are upsetting us, or we are eating the wrong food and not giving ourselves enough time to relax and digest it. But there are some symptoms that could be caused by gastrointestinal disease, for which you need to see a doctor.

The Digestive Health Assessment has been created by leading gut health experts to help identify digestive complaints. It can be easy to miss signs of possible gut problems. By answering these simple questions you can check your digestive health and see whether it would be wise to seek help.

Section A

- There has been a persistent change in my bowel habit, which cannot be explained by stress, changing my diet, medications or going away.
- I have seen blood on my stools (motions, faeces) recently.
- I have experienced persistent abdominal pain, which is not related to changing my diet or stress.
- I have lost weight (more than 2kg or 4 pounds) recently for no obvious reason.
- I have lost my appetite and/or feel sick frequently for no obvious reason.
- I have had a persistent gut upset associated with symptoms of fever, shivering, sweating and feeling unwell.

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If you have answered yes to one or more of the questions in section A, you may have a gastrointestinal condition that requires medical treatment. We would strongly advise that you speak with your doctor as soon as possible. You may also like to contact Core (www.corecharity.org.uk) for more information on specific gastrointestinal conditions.

Section B

- I either open my bowels several times a day or don’t go at all.
- My stools can vary from being soft and watery to hard pellets.
- I often feel the urge to go but can’t.
- Stress often upsets my stomach.
- There are so many different foods that upset me; I don’t know what to eat.
- As well as abdominal and bowel symptoms, I can feel so tired and get indigestion, muscle pains and lots of other symptoms.
- My stomach is so bad, it makes me frustrated and depressed.
- The bloating is so bad, I can look as though I am several months pregnant.

If you have answered yes to any of these questions and do not have the more severe symptoms in section A, the chances are that you have IBS. For help, please visit www.theibsnetwork.org and consult The IBS Self Care Plan. If your symptoms do not improve, talk to your GP or practice nurse.
Section C

- I rarely eat breakfast.
- I do not eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day and rarely have cereals for breakfast.
- I take very little exercise.
- I sit in front of the television for more than two hours every day.
- I have put on too much weight.
- I rarely go a day without an alcoholic drink.
- I smoke cigarettes regularly.
- I have very poor quality sleep.
- I suffer from stress.

If you have answered yes to one or more of the questions in section C, you may want to consider some of the lifestyle changes suggested in this leaflet. You may also like to take a look at the Love Your Gut website (www.loveyourgut.com) for more information on maintaining good digestive health.
Some simple advice

General tips for better digestive – and overall – health:

- **Breakfast**: Evidence shows that people who eat a healthy breakfast tend to eat more dietary fibre, more vitamins and less fat. This may help stimulate the bowels to empty regularly.

- **Eating fruit, vegetables** and **wholegrain cereals** may help to reduce the risk of developing certain conditions, including those of the digestive system. These foods are high in fibre, antioxidants and other protective nutrients, but they may also contain poorly absorbed sugars or starches that can cause symptoms of pain, bloating and diarrhoea in patients with Irritable Bowel Syndrome.

- **Increase your level of activity and step up the amount of exercise** you take, with a brisk walk (at least 30 minutes) each day. Take regular breaks between the times you sit at your desk or in front of the television. Take up swimming, walk the dog...and, if you drive a car, try one ‘car-free’ day each week.

- **Alcohol** damages every part of the body, not just the liver. It can damage your digestive system too. Above 14 units per week for women (and 21 units for men), the risk of disease increases. Avoid ‘binge’ drinking.

- **Smoking** is linked to a variety of diseases. Try to stop or cut down as much as possible.

- **Everyone needs a good night’s sleep**, because sleep quality affects many aspects of health including bowel function, appetite, body **weight** and mental function (e.g. performance while driving).

- **Stress**: Do the things you enjoying doing and not just the things you have to do. This will limit the harmful effects of stress on your body.

- **Being overweight can put great strain on the digestive and other systems of the body. Aim to reach a healthy weight – and keep your waist measurements below 86cm if you’re a woman and 102cm for men.**

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**Love Your Gut** is an awareness campaign and initiative of Core and the IBS Network in association with Yakult UK Limited. It is also responsible for Gut Week – the annual digestive health awareness campaign, which highlights the importance of maintaining good gut health.

[www.loveyourgut.com](http://www.loveyourgut.com)  
Tel: 020 8839 3258  
info@loveyourgut.com

**Love Your Gut partners**

**Core** – the Digestive Disorders Foundation – is a national charity that funds medical research into the prevention, cure and treatment of digestive disorders, and provides information for patients and sufferers.

Tel: 020 7486 0341 [www.corecharity.org.uk](http://www.corecharity.org.uk)

The **IBS Network** is the UK’s national charity for Irritable Bowel Syndrome, informing, advising and supporting people with IBS and working with health care professionals to facilitate self-management through its comprehensive IBS Self Care Plan.

Tel: 0114 272 3253 [www.theibsnetwork.org](http://www.theibsnetwork.org)

Core and the IBS Network do not endorse any specific commercial or pharmaceutical products. This leaflet has been created with advice from the experts at the IBS Network.