

GUT INSTINCT

WHAT IS GORD?

Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) is a chronic condition where stomach acid frequently flows back into the oesophagus, irritating its lining. The most common symptom of GORD is **persistent heartburn**, a burning sensation in the chest or throat that often worsens after eating, lying down, or at night. Another hallmark symptom is **acid regurgitation**, where sour or bitter-tasting acid rises into the throat or mouth, sometimes accompanied by excessive burping.



Other symptoms may include **difficulty swallowing** (dysphagia), a sensation of a lump in the throat, or chest discomfort that may mimic heart pain. GORD can also cause non-digestive symptoms such as **chronic cough**, **hoarseness**, or worsening asthma symptoms. In severe cases, GORD may lead to nausea, vomiting, or damage to the oesophagus, resulting in bleeding or scarring.

Occasional heartburn is common. It may be triggered by a large meal or certain foods or drinks, like onions, chilli, chocolate, citrus, fatty foods, coffee or alcohol. Being overweight or pregnant, smoking, stress and anxiety and certain medications may also give you heartburn.

Although heartburn is common, you should see your doctor if -

- Heartburn occurs more than twice a week or persists despite lifestyle changes or over-the-counter medications.
- You experience difficulty swallowing or feel like food is stuck in your throat.
- Symptoms disrupt your sleep or daily life.
- There is unexplained weight loss, vomiting, or blood in your vomit or stools.
- You have chest pain, especially if it radiates to your arm, neck, or jaw, as this could indicate a heart-related issue.

The symptoms of GORD can have a significant impact on one's quality of life. Lifestyle changes can make a difference and there are effective medications available. Treating GORD is important as longstanding GORD can lead to complications, like strictures or Barrett's oesophagus.

HOW YOU CAN IMPROVE YOUR GUT HEALTH



1. **Eat a Diverse Diet** A variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins fosters a diverse microbiome—essential for gut health.
2. **Increase prebiotics and fibre in your diet.** The role of prebiotics in the diet is limited. In general there is a lack of fibre in the modern Australian diet and most people would benefit from adding 5-10g of fibre daily in order to reach the daily goal of 25-30g daily. Incorporate chia seeds, flax seeds, nuts, grains, fruits for the most amount of fibre per weight.

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3. **Stay Hydrated** Proper hydration supports digestion and helps maintain the mucosal lining of your intestines.
4. **Limit Processed Foods and Sugars** Processed foods and excessive sugar can disrupt your microbiome's balance and contribute to inflammation.
5. **Manage Stress** Chronic stress takes a toll on your gut. Incorporate stress-reducing activities like mindfulness, yoga, or regular exercise into your routine.
6. **Get Enough Sleep** Quality sleep is essential for gut health. Aim for 7-9 hours each night to allow your gut to repair and function optimally.
7. **Consult a Specialist** If you're dealing with persistent gut issues, don't hesitate to reach out to a healthcare provider or gastroenterologist. We can help diagnose and treat underlying problems.

Your gut is one of the most reliable indicators of your overall health. By paying attention to its signals and making intentional changes, you can improve not just your digestion but your energy, immunity, and mood as well.

COELIAC DISEASE VS GLUTEN INTOLERANCE

What are the key differences?

Coeliac disease and gluten intolerance, also known as non-coeliac gluten sensitivity (NCGS), are different conditions with overlapping symptoms. Symptoms may include abdominal pain, bloating, diarrhoea, constipation, fatigue, headaches, nausea, vomiting, skin conditions and joint pain. There is increasing evidence of symptoms such as anxiety and feelings of depression too.



Coeliac disease is an autoimmune disorder triggered by gluten ingestion, causing damage to the small intestine, while **non-coeliac gluten sensitivity (NCGS)** describes symptoms attributed to gluten without an autoimmune response or inflammation.

Whilst there is no cure for coeliac disease, following a strict gluten-free diet is imperative to help minimise symptoms and keep the condition at bay. This is vital, even if symptoms are very mild, as even the smallest amount can have detrimental effects on the body.

For NCGS, the mechanism is poorly understood, but it is thought that there is a direct reaction to wheat, gluten or even the carbohydrates (FODMAPs) in wheat during the process of digestion, causing abdominal symptoms. There is still no actual 'test' for gluten intolerance, and scientists are yet to determine the root cause of the condition.

Unlike people with coeliac disease, people with NCGS may find they can tolerate a small amount of gluten in their diets, and there are no long term health problems.

Self-diagnosing and eliminating gluten without medical guidance can lead to nutritional deficiencies or mask other conditions. It's important you check in with your GP first to make sure it's gluten causing the reaction and not another condition entirely, such as irritable bowel syndrome. It is also important to rule out Coeliac disease.

Coeliac Australia offer a free self-assessment quiz online so you can check if your symptoms could be coeliac disease. Take the 3 minute quiz via their website to see if you might be at risk.