

When a nervous stomach becomes a problem: How teens can eat for their anxious gut

By Nicole Dalrymple

The symptoms caused by mental health do not stop in the mind: there are also plenty of physical symptoms. One of these symptoms, which may target anybody who is stressed, nervous, or anxious, is a nervous stomach. This may be extremely inconvenient for teens, and may prohibit them from completing assignments or being socially fulfilled. The causes of a chronically upset stomach may indicate something more serious, and a visit to their doctor should always be recommended. A common condition is irritable bowel syndrome, which also causes plenty of nasty symptoms when stressed. Below are some tips to suggest for eating for a nervous stomach: it is important to remember that these are only general suggestions, and different bodies will tolerate different things.

Cut down on this!

1. *Caffeine*

While caffeine has helped plenty of people stay away and focused, it may also be hurting teens' stomachs - it stimulates the nervous system, causing excess stomach acid, and may bring on cramping of the abdominal muscles, gas, diarrhea, and bloating, on top of increased mental anxiety (Group, 2015). And yes - this means avoiding some teas, energy drinks, and even chocolate! Alcohol may bring on similar symptoms.

2. *Spicy foods*

Especially for anybody who doesn't regularly consume spicy foods and has no tolerance, they may wreak havoc on the digestive system. Some of the compounds found in spicy food, like capsaicin, are not broken down in digestion and can irritate the lining of the stomach or intestines. This will also cause them to move through the system faster, resulting in diarrhea (Baker, 2013). Not a good pre-prom option!

3. *Gum*

Chewing gum causes more air to be swallowed and become trapped in the stomach or small intestines, which brings on gas and bloating. Special avoidance should be given to sugar-free gum: sorbitol, xylitol, and more, often used as sweeteners, pull water out of the large intestine. This can cause swelling, bloating, and possibly diarrhea (Shape, n.d.). A fresh breath alternative: peppermints with real peppermint oil, as discussed below.

Enjoy more of this!

1. *Peppermint*

Peppermint is a popular digestion aid - on top of having a numbing effect known to stop headaches and skin irritation, peppermint also calms stomach muscles and improves bile flow. Bonus: the smell has been said to lessen anxiety, and it can be consumed in a variety of ways, from (caffeine-free) tea to pills. Don't recommend this to any young adults with gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) - it may worsen the symptoms (Ehrlich, 2014). Ginger tea may boast similar benefits!

2. *Water*

As everybody knows, water does good things to just about every part of your body - and a nervous stomach is no exception. Dehydration, on top of bringing on headaches, a tired feeling, and more, also causes stomach cramping. Water may also cool down the stomach, which is a pleasant feeling when cramped (CalmClinic, n.d.).



Glass of water, retrieved from <http://maxpixel.freegreatpicture.com/Drink-Green-Lemon-Glass-Water-Glass-For-Water-1901700>

3. *BRAT*

Nope, not a whiny child - BRAT is a low fiber diet standing for bananas, rice, apples, and toast. These foods are easy to digest, do not irritate the gut as much, and ultimately may curb nausea or diarrhea. Though these should not be the only foods a person consumes, focusing on them the day of a stressful test or school play may temporarily limit stool production (Hultin, 2015).

For more information, young adults may be referred to information on a low FODMAP diet, which sorts out the foods poorly absorbed by people with uneasy stomachs. They may also want to experiment with cutting out lactose or gluten for a short period of time. Teens may have to spend some time learning

which foods work for them, so be understanding during this process.

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