

# This 4-Step Plan Will Relieve Morning Bloating



## **Start Here: Really Clear Out the Pipes**

"The vast majority of people with bloat start with constipation," says Robynne Chutkan, MD, gastroenterologist and author of the forthcoming book *The Bloat Cure: 101 Natural Solutions for Real and Lasting Relief*. Now, you may say, "I'm not constipated—I go every day!" but, as Chutkan notes, many people experience "incomplete evacuation," where there's still some stool left.

**How to do it:** Start drinking water as soon as you wake up to help flush your digestive system. Over the course of the day, aim to drink enough water to keep your pee a light yellow color or herbal teas brewed from carminatives—herbs such as [ginger](#) that reduce gas formation and help expel it. (Just skip the straw, which can draw in extra air and bloat you further.) You can also think about adding a fiber supplement to your breakfast. Chutkan recommends 1 teaspoon of finely ground psyllium husk (find it online or at a vitamin store) mixed with at least 8 ounces of liquid, with a second glass of water as a chaser. Ground psyllium husk may take a few days to fully clear the plumbing, but it will

provide some relief within half a day.

### **And Then Do This: Get Physical**

Kick-start a sluggish colon by exercising, says GI specialist Kathlynn Caguiat, MD, of New York's Lenox Hill Hospital. "It helps stimulate gut movement, allowing pockets of gas to be expelled and alleviating that uncomfortable bloating sensation," she explains. "As little as 10 minutes can help." Walking at a leisurely pace after a large meal helped food move through the stomach faster, reported a study in the *Journal of Gastrointestinal and Liver Diseases*, allowing gas to pass through more easily, too.

**How to do it:** Caguiat has found walking, core-strengthening moves like side planks and jumping jacks to be effective, and Chutkan offers these other physical bloat-busters:

- *Twisted yoga pose*—You've probably heard of wind-relieving pose, but Chutkan suggests this move as well. It puts pressure on different parts of the bowel to safely push gas and liquid through. Standing with legs together, bend your knees and lower your bottom as if to sit in a chair; with palms together in a prayer position, rotate your spine to touch your right elbow to your left knee, holding for 30 to 45 seconds; repeat on the other side.
- *"Happy Abs" massage*—Lie down on your back and use gentle pressure to massage your belly in a clockwise motion to manually move gas bubbles through your GI tract.
- *Diaphragmatic breathing*—It relaxes the muscles of the colon to calm spasms and release trapped air. Lying on your back, place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly. As you inhale and exhale, you should feel your bottom hand moving up and down, which signals deeper, belly breathing. (If your chest is rising and falling, those are shallower breaths.) Experiment until your belly is doing all the moving, then inhale for 4 counts and exhale for 6. Continue for 5 to 10 minutes.

### **If You're Still Feeling Like the Michelin Man: Hit the Medicine Cabinet**

**To relieve the bloat now:** Simethicone (found in many over-the-counter antacids—check the label) changes the surface tension of gas bubbles so they collapse and more easily make an exit.

**For a longer-term solution:** Consider probiotics, which restore good bacteria to the gut for better digestion. It's especially helpful in people whose gut bacteria may be out of whack—usually because of a poor diet, illness or antibiotics. "I had one patient for whom probiotics were life-changing," says Jacqueline Wolf, MD, associate professor of medicine at Harvard University and author of *A Woman's Guide to a Healthy Stomach*. "She said it made the biggest difference in her bloating and constipation." Experiment with different brands and strains until you find one that makes you feel better, and give it at least two weeks to take effect.

### **To Keep It from Happening Again Tomorrow Morning: Change Your Menu —Starting Today**

Artificial sugars that you might add to your morning coffee or tea (like manitol, sorbitol and xylitol) can lead to bloating, says Shawn Khodadadian, MD, of Manhattan Gastroenterology, because our gut bacteria have to do the lion's share of digesting them, and those bacteria produce gas as they digest. Healthier foods can cause the same problem. A few examples: high-sugar fruits (like grapes, cherries, apples and pears), cruciferous vegetables (cabbage, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and bok choy), and legumes.

**How to do it:** For those prone to bloat, limiting or at least cutting back on these foods can help, according to a 2012 study in *Gastroenterology & Hepatology*. (Ask your doctor about going on an elimination diet, in which you cut out possible culprits until your symptoms stop, then slowly reintroduce them to find out which one(s) is causing the problem). Reach instead for items like papaya and pineapple, which have digesting-aiding enzymes called papain and bromelain, respectively; celery and fennel, which Khodadadian says act as diuretics to release retained water; asparagus, with compounds that work like healthy bacteria to help with digestion; and ginger, which is both anti-inflammatory and anti-spasmodic to relax the colon. Whatever you're eating, remember to chew thoroughly to keep you from gulping extra air that contributes to bloat.

**If none of these fixes work** - Talk to your doctor about whether a medication you're

taking for another condition could be to blame, or if you could have a more serious reason for bloating, including Celiac disease or obstruction of the GI tract. More rarely, it can be a sign of certain cancers, and in those cases, you'd likely also be experiencing can't-miss symptoms such as vomiting, not passing gas or stools, abdominal pain and distention and weight loss.