

Tummy trouble

Overeating, fatty foods, emotional stress, and too many sweets and alcohol – thankfully, herbs can ease the indigestion they cause.

Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*)

Antispasmodic, sedative, soothing, and carminative (meaning it expels wind from the intestines), peppermint relieves cramps, bloating, nausea, colitis, and diarrhoea. The enteric-coated capsules are recommended for anyone with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Interestingly, Dr Varro Tyler, dean and Professor Emeritus of Pharmacognosy at Purdue University, advises that most of peppermint's carminative oils are relatively insoluble in water, so the tea contains little of the herb's digestion-soothing ability: peppermint tincture is much more effective.

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)

This aids digestion in two ways: it increases peristalsis (the contractions that move food through the gut), which in turn boosts secretion of digestive enzymes and removes stagnating food in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract; it also has pain-relieving and antispasmodic properties, thus soothing an irritated gut, and relieving nausea, colic, and

cramps. Ginger also improves other herbs' potency by speeding up delivery of their chemical constituents to the bloodstream, for faster absorption. Note: Avoid if you have gastric or peptic ulcers, gallstones, or are on blood-thinning meds.

Chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*)

Chamomile's bitter principles stimulate production of bile and gastric juices, making it an excellent liver and gallbladder tonic, appetite stimulant, digestive aid, and treatment for stomach tension, gastritis, colic, flatulence, and bloating. It is a powerful antispasmodic, making it highly effective for IBS; in fact, it has been approved by Germany's prestigious Commission E for treating spasmodic and inflammatory disorders of the GI tract. The tea is effective and safe for infants.

Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*)

Long used as a carminative in Eastern and Western herbal medicine, fennel is an active ingredient in 'gripe water', an ancient infant colic remedy, as well as a traditional breath freshener offered after meals in Indian cuisine. Fennel's volatile oils stimulate secretion of bile and gastric juices, improving food digestion and nutrient absorption. Being rich in fibre, the seeds are also an effective laxative, helping to clear the bowel of waste.

Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*)

A great herbal digestive remedy, especially recommended for conditions associated with excess acidity and inflammation, like heartburn, gastritis, ulcers, and hiatus hernia. This is because it not only leaves a protective coating on the lining of the GI tract, but actually down-regulates



In a Taiwanese study, IBS patients given peppermint oil capsules 30 minutes before meals had a significant reduction in bloating and wind.



production of stomach acid; plus, it contains antibacterial and astringent tannins that relax stomach and bowel muscles, so easing cramping as well as fighting infection. Avoid if pregnant or breast-feeding.

D-I-Y with Toni:



Stomach-soothing tea

Combine 1 teaspoon each of peppermint and meadowsweet with ½ teaspoon each of crushed fennel seeds and meadowsweet and a pinch of dried ginger. Pour over 1 cup of boiling water, cover and steep for five minutes, strain and add honey, to taste. Sip 2-3 cups daily.

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