



The Bloated Belly Whisperer: FAQs

What is a Bloated Belly?

Bloating refers to a feeling of pressure or discomfort—just short of pain—somewhere in the abdominal area, and/or visible distension of the abdomen that makes your waistline grow. It may affect the top of the abdomen right underneath the breastbone, the lower part of the abdomen underneath the belly button or the entire midsection more generally. Bloating is a symptom, not a medical condition in and of itself.

What causes a Bloated Belly?

Bloating usually results from an accumulation of substances passing through the digestive tract, or the abnormal handling of these substances by the nerves or muscles in charge of sensation and motility in your stomach or intestines. This means that the pressure sensation or distension you experience when bloated is typically triggered by one or more of these three things moving through the digestive system:

- Gas (either swallowed air or produced by the bacteria in your intestines)
- Food
- Stool

Bloating can be caused by many different medical conditions that range from completely benign to quite serious. Ten medical diagnoses associated with abdominal bloating are among the most common, however, and these are the ones taken up in detail in **THE BLOATED BELLY WHISPERER**.

When should I be concerned that my Bloated Belly is the sign of something potentially serious?

There are some less common situations in which bloating is a symptom of something serious. Certain cancers, like colon cancer and ovarian cancer, can present with a bloated belly, as can advanced liver disease. These produce bloating as the result of a tumor or excess fluid in the gut or abdominal cavity—not gas, food or stool.

If you have a family history of colon cancer, ovarian cancer or are a known carrier of the BRCA gene, it is prudent to consult your doctor if you begin to develop a bloated belly, particularly if your belly's distension never goes down under any circumstances, like being fasted or having a complete bowel movement.

Other signs that something potentially serious may be happening that needs to be investigated include:

- Unintentional weight loss of more than a few pounds
- Blood in your stool
- Recurrent vomiting
- Jaundice (yellowing skin or yellowing of the whites of your eyes)
- Nutritional deficiencies, such as anemia
- Fever

How do I figure out what's causing my Bloating Belly?

THE BLOATED BELLY WHISPERER contains a quiz that can help narrow down the more likely causes of your bloating, and you can read about the top contenders to see which may sound familiar.

A visit to a gastroenterologist and/or a registered dietitian (RD) is also great place to start when seeking the cause of your bloated belly. Generally, they will try to examine the clues which would indicate whether your bloating originates in the stomach or intestines, though certainly it's possible to have problems that produce bloating in both regions. If your bloating is concentrated toward the top of your abdomen, or is accompanied by other "upper GI" symptoms like nausea, burping, loss of appetite, vomiting or heartburn—it's more likely to have its roots in the stomach. If your bloating is concentrated underneath the belly button, or is accompanied by "lower GI" symptoms like diarrhea, constipation, cramping, excess intestinal gas (farting) or gas pain—it's more likely to have its roots in the intestines.

Once your healthcare provider has a hypothesis about the cause of your bloating, s/he may order diagnostic tests to confirm it or just try treating you with the medicine, supplements and/or diet therapies for that condition to see if you respond.

How can a dietitian help me figure out the cause of my bloating?

Dietitians are food and nutrition experts. When they meet with you, they ask very different types of questions than a doctor would, and are far more likely to inquire how different foods affect your symptoms and in what time frames. A dietitian—particularly one who is experienced with gastrointestinal disorders—should have the type of specialized knowledge to help interpret the meaning of different adverse food reactions, and use this information as a clue toward the cause of your bloating. Dietitians are also likely to spend more time with you than would a typical doctor.

Dietitians cannot diagnose medical conditions. But they can “prescribe” diet changes based on a known or suspected medical diagnosis to observe how your symptoms respond to the change. Your response to a diet change—or even lack of response—will often provide helpful data to a medical doctor tasked with diagnosing and treating you. Most people with one of the ten types of bloating discussed in **THE BLOATED BELLY WHISPERER** will notice a significant improvement in their symptoms within days of initiating the correct therapeutic diet for their condition, whether or not they’ve been given a formal diagnosis.

Once I know the cause of my bloated belly, what can I do to fix it?

The fix for bloating varies by cause. **THE BLOATED BELLY WHISPERER** explains the full suite of available remedies for each of the top ten causes of bloating. Solutions may include a specific therapeutic diet, changes to your meal patterns or eating behaviors, a particular type of supplement or over-the-counter medication, a range of prescription medication options, physical or behavioral therapy... or some combination of remedies in these categories.

In isolated cases, a cure to the underlying cause of bloating may be available. More often than not, however, treatments will focus on symptom control because the underlying problem may not be reversible.

The healthier I eat, the more bloated I feel. Why is this?

Many foods that are objectively healthy can be very uncomfortable for some people to digest. More often than not, this is the result of a healthy food’s fiber content—either the type of fiber it contains, the amount of it, or the texture of it.

- Bulky fibrous foods like leafy salads, kale, wheat bran, popcorn and nuts—may be loaded with health promoting nutrients, but are also

high in “insoluble fiber” that can aggravate several different types of bloating.

- Other nutritious foods like beans, apples, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower or garlic are similarly high in essential nutrients and antioxidants, but contain fibers or sugars that can generate significant amounts of gas in the intestines. This can provoke bloating in certain people.
- Large amounts of fiber from any source can slow down the stomach’s emptying rate and provoke bloating in susceptible people. It can also build up in the colon of people who are unable to move their bowels regularly due to abnormal pelvic floor muscle coordination—provoking lower abdominal bloating.

When you struggle with bloating, your goal should be to consume the healthiest diet you can comfortably tolerate. **THE BLOATED BELLY WHISPERER** discusses the issue of fiber in great detail, steering readers to the healthy foods they are most likely to tolerate based on the type of bloating they have.

What can I eat if I dine out frequently for work?

While the dietary specifics will vary by type of bloating, there are a few common attributes to restaurant cuisines that will render them more likely to agree with the majority of people who struggle with bloating. These include:

- menus/cuisines not too centered around garlic or sauces
- availability of lower-fat options
- large selection of appetizers or small plates to facilitate portion control

In practical terms, many people who struggle with bloating find that they do the best at the following types of restaurants:

- **Japanese/sushi restaurants:** Sushi and miso soup meet the criteria above, and generally fit well with both the GI Gentle and Low FODMAP diets described in **THE BLOATED BELLY WHISPERER**. Japanese cuisine also has options for people with celiac disease following gluten-free diets.
- **Steakhouse:** While steaks themselves may aggravate certain types of bloating due to their high fat content or tough texture, typical steakhouse menus offer a variety of low-fat, minimally-adorned seafood options, like grilled fish/shrimp, seared scallops and shrimp cocktail. They also offer baked potatoes and un-sauced vegetables that can be cooked and seasoned to order with or without garlic, like sautéed

spinach, asparagus and broccoli. People on GI Gentle, Low FODMAP and gluten-free diets can all find numerous suitable options on these a la carte menus.

- **Diners:** An omelet is usually a safe bet for people with many different types of bloating, and diners typically offer a whole host of them for breakfast, lunch or dinner. Omelets can be customized to include the ingredients you tolerate best as detailed in Chapters 11 on fiber and Chapters 12 and 13 that cover the main therapeutic diets for bloating.

Is gluten the root of all evil?

Gluten is a storage protein found in wheat, barley and rye—and a whole list of foods related to and derived from them that are listed in Chapter 10 of **THE BLOATED BELLY WHISPERER**. Gluten is just one of thousands upon thousands of food proteins we encounter in our diets.

People with celiac disease must avoid gluten completely—not because it’s evil, but because their immune systems behave abnormally when they consume it, launching a self-directed attack on the intestines. Gluten is no eviler than peanuts or tree pollen: just because some people have faulty immune systems that result in allergies to the proteins in these substances, it’s not the ‘fault’ of the food in question so much as that of the person’s immune system. Chapter 10 details how to follow a strict gluten-free diet for people with celiac disease.

While many people with bloating feel somewhat better when adopting a “gluten free” diet, it’s usually not because the gluten was triggering their symptoms. Wheat contains far more than just gluten—it has other types of proteins, fiber (bran) and various types of carbohydrates—any of which can trigger an adverse reaction in someone. Research has shown that the majority of people without celiac disease who feel bloated after eating wheat are actually reacting to a type of carbohydrate in wheat called a fructan, not to gluten. Fructans are one of the “FODMAPs” described in Chapter 12 of **THE BLOATED BELLY WHISPERER**, and a list of foods that contain them is included there.

Wheat-based foods that contain gluten but no fructans—like soy sauce and sourdough bread for example—are usually very well tolerated by people without celiac disease who often find themselves bloated after eating foods like bread, pasta or crackers. Similarly, some gluten-free foods that are high in fructans from other ingredients (onions, garlic, chicory root fiber/inulin) will aggravate bloating in these same people.

Will probiotics cure my bloated belly?

Probiotics get a lot of press with regard to digestive health, but it's unlikely that they'll cure a bloated belly.

Most causes of bloating that originate in the intestines aren't likely to respond to probiotic supplements, and Chapter 14 of **THE BLOATED BELLY WHISPERER** reviews the scientific research behind a variety of popular probiotic brands and bacterial strains to summarize which products have demonstrated benefit for improving which digestive symptoms. One issue for which a probiotic may have some utility is constipation-related bloating; a select few species/strains of probiotics have demonstrated promise in increasing frequency of bowel movements—and this can help relieve bloating as a result. These are discussed in Chapter 14. In reality though, if a probiotic is going to help address constipation, it's far more likely to help as one component of a multi-pronged strategy that involves other interventions as well. Probiotics are rarely a single “silver bullet” for constipation.

If your bloating originates in the stomach, probiotic supplements will probably be useless. Probiotic pills are coated to survive the stomach's acid environment, so the bacteria contained within them will not be released until the pill arrives into the intestines. Also, exceedingly few species bacteria can survive and function in the low (acidic) stomach pH--and certainly none of these are included among those marketed as commercial probiotics.

I've read online that having candida can cause bloating. How do I know if this is causing my bloating?

“Candida” refers to *Candida albicans*, which is the name of a yeast that's a normal part of the bacterial community residing in almost everyone's colon, also known as the gut microbiota. Practically everyone's stool tests should contain traces of it, and most every adult with a well-functioning immune system will have developed blood antibodies against it, too. This is because we're all exposed to this yeast at some point, given how prevalent it is in our environment.

Candida albicans in the colon does not cause bloating. Like all yeasts, the *Candida albicans* in your colon produces carbon dioxide gas when it digests (ferments) any leftover fiber or carbohydrates in your waste. This carbon dioxide quickly diffuses into your bloodstream, travels to the lungs and gets breathed out. Therefore, it does not linger in the colon and contribute to the intestinal gas burden. The vast majority of the gasses in your colon—the kind

that you fart out-- are produced by bacteria, not yeasts, and this process is explained in detail in Chapters 8 and 9 of **THE BLOATED BELLY WHISPERER**.

Contrary to popular Internet lore, candida does not live 'systemically' in the bloodstream to cause bloating, either. Therefore, anti-fungal medications are not an effective remedy for bloating. In fact, if a yeast like *candida* were to make it into your bloodstream from the gut, it would cause an acute, life-threatening blood infection.

Who is Tamara Duker Freuman?

Tamara is a New York City based registered dietitian (RD) who has spent close to a decade working in a leading gastroenterology practice known for specialized diagnostics and digestive mystery-solving. Gastroenterologists from all over New York City refer their most challenging cases to Tamara to help them hone in on elusive medical diagnoses while steering patients toward the right diet to manage their symptoms. She specializes in deciphering a person's gastrointestinal symptoms as they relate to eating and food, listening for the telltale clues that reveal the most likely cause of a bloated belly and other common digestive complaints, like diarrhea, constipation, abdominal pain and nausea.

Tamara is also one of U.S. News & World Report's most-read online contributors, having authored close to 200 articles for their eat+run blog to date.

Why did Tamara decide to write this book?

Before landing in her office, most of Tamara's bloated patients had seen multiple medical doctors, undergone many diagnostic tests, and tried at least one type of elimination diet—all to no avail. Many of them had also spent a fortune on functional, integrative or naturopathic practitioners whose office visits, lab tests and extensive supplement protocols were not covered by insurance—and brought them no closer to a resolution, either. These patients typically arrived full of Internet-fueled misconceptions about how their digestive systems worked, and were utterly confused about what to eat and what not to eat. While bloating is such a common problem, Tamara came to realize that there wasn't enough expert help out there to go around.

Meanwhile, after counseling thousands of bloated patients over the course of years, Tamara had become highly adept at listening to a person's description of their symptoms as they related to eating patterns and isolating the most likely cause(s) of their bloating. This was even the case for patients who arrived without a medical diagnosis. Realizing how quickly her patients could

find substantial relief of their symptoms with a proper assessment and diagnosis, Tamara felt compelled to broaden her reach beyond her boutique, New York City based medical practice. **THE BLOATED BELLY WHISPERER** is her attempt to share what she knows about bloating with both patients and fellow nutrition practitioners across the country to make scientifically-sound, expert help more accessible to all.

What common misperceptions do people have about bloating that this book will clear up?

Understandably, the promise of a ‘silver bullet’ solution to a problem like bloating is very tempting. In reality, though, resolving bloating often involves a multi-pronged strategy that can include changes in the food one eats (both excluding certain foods AND including more of others); changes in meal/eating patterns; medications; supplements; and/or behavioral therapies/lifestyle changes. It’s rare for a bloated person to find complete relief with a single, simple change, like just starting on a probiotic supplement, or adopting a gluten-free diet—though certainly in some cases, these may be elements of a more comprehensive solution for people with specific types of bloating.

Also, it’s hard not to be swayed by testimonials from friends or people online who swear by remedies that have worked for them. But it’s important to realize that what works for one person’s bloating often doesn’t help another person. This comes back to the point that there are many different medical causes of bloating, and they require individualized and tailored solutions. Bloating is not a symptom with a one-size-fits-all solution.