

Bloated stomach and tummy pains

Q I am a 21-year-old man. In recent months, my stomach has been bloated with air. Off and on, the "wind" in my stomach causes tummy pains and I would relieve it with Eno effervescent fruit salts.

Why does my stomach constantly have so much "wind"? Should I see a doctor?

A Discomfort in the upper abdominal region, otherwise known as dyspepsia, is a very common condition. Some of the common dyspeptic symptoms include bloating, fullness after meals and pain. Bloating is a subjective symptom and should be distinguished from abdominal distension, which is a measurable increase in abdominal girth.

Patients who feel bloated may or may not have corresponding abdominal distension.

A visit to the doctor would be useful to exclude a more significant disease; otherwise, it is highly likely that you have a functional gastrointestinal disorder, in this case functional dyspepsia or functional bloating.

The term "functional" means that there is no underlying organic disease such as an infection or cancer, but the patient has very real symptoms. Multiple factors contribute towards dyspepsia, such as diet, hypersensitivity of the nerves in the gut, variations in gut motility (intestinal contractions) and how much the stomach can accommodate.

Simple measures would include avoiding "trigger" foods that could be the cause of your symptoms and eating a balanced diet with moderate quantity meals.

Medication could range from simple antacids and "digestive aids" to a trial of acid suppressants and prokinetics (drugs that work to speed up the emptying of the stomach and the movement of the intestines).

If these do not work, your doctor may then decide to embark on tests such as an endoscopy (which uses a scope to see the inside of the body) and radiologic imaging.



DR REUBEN WONG,
consultant at the department of
gastroenterology & hepatology at
National University Hospital