

LIFE

Avoid the Christmas bloat



By Melissa Carr, Special to 24 hours
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Holiday eating is delicious, but must be done in moderation. (FOTOLIA)

With the holiday season in full swing, many are enjoying festive parties. Unfortunately, the boozy beverages and fancy feasts that accompany many of these events cause bloating that doesn't do justice to the dressy clothing you don — ugly Christmas sweaters, notwithstanding. It is possible, however, to enjoy a night out without having to suffer discomfort.

The first and most common sense approach to avoid bloating is to avoid overeating. Eat more slowly to allow the body to signal that you are no longer hungry, and stop eating before you are stuffed.

Bloating can also occur from swallowing air, so try to avoid activities most likely to cause this, including chewing gum, drinking through a straw, smoking, and drinking carbonated drinks — just another reason to give up cigarettes and pop. In addition, some people swallow more air when they are nervous, so practicing some relaxation techniques may be helpful.

Certain foods are also more likely to cause bloating. Rich, greasy foods take more time to digest, so limit their quantities. Legumes — beans and lentils — are well-known to be gassy foods because of their indigestible sugars, called oligosaccharides, that need to be broken down by bacteria in the intestines. Legumes are more easily digested if they are soaked for at least a few hours and rinsed prior to cooking.

Since many people do not produce enough lactase, an enzyme that breaks down milk sugars (lactose), dairy may be a trouble food. Some cannot tolerate any dairy at all, while others do OK with yogurt and aged cheeses, as the lactose is at least partially broken down by bacteria.

If you know that you are going to be eating foods that are likely to bloat you, consider taking a digestive enzyme blend before your meal. Drink dandelion tea to help stimulate bile production so you can break down fatty foods. Chew fennel seeds after eating to ease gas. And take a probiotic supplement to support a healthy colon.

Because bloating can also signify more chronic health issues, such as gastritis, Celiac disease, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), Crohn's, colitis, chronic constipation, hernia, parasitic infection, gallstones, ovarian cyst, polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), and food allergies, it is important to get checked out if the symptoms are ongoing.

Traditional Chinese Medicine offers many herbs, acupuncture, and food recommendations that can support digestion, treat and manage diseases and symptoms, and improve overall health. If bloating is putting a damper on your celebrations, know that there are many options beyond avoiding everyone in Scrooge-like fashion.

Dr. Melissa Carr is a registered doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine, caring for patients in an integrative medicine clinic in Vancouver.

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