

The State Of The Nation's Gut

A report summarising the Love Your Gut 2017
research findings



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A summary of the key findings and the rationale behind the Love Your Gut campaign

The gut is not just responsible for processing food. This nine metre marvel also holds the majority of our immune system and can tell us a lot about our wider health and wellbeing – there is a reason why sayings such as ‘trust your gut’ and ‘gut instinct’ have been used for generations.

However, despite the important role the gut plays in the body, it also appears to be one of the most neglected areas of our health. In this report, looking at the state of the nation’s gut health and our understanding of key gut health complaints and symptoms, we learn that **63%** of people have experienced a persistent gut problem, but **half** of them (**29%**) have not sought professional medical help.

Gut complaints not only affect significant numbers of the population, but they also have a far reaching impact on people’s lives. **One in five** people have had to take time off work due to their symptoms and over a **quarter (28%)** avoid going out. **One in ten** people have even suffered depression as a result of gut problems.

The findings of this report suggest that there is a clear need to develop and encourage greater public awareness and understanding of gut health issues, so more people are empowered to, and know when to, seek professional medical help.

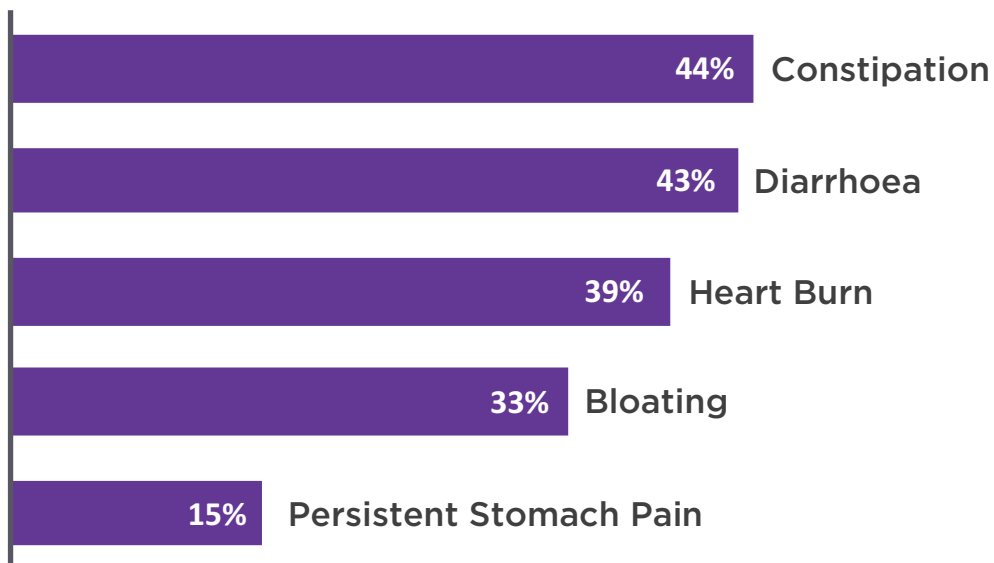


2. Most common health problems

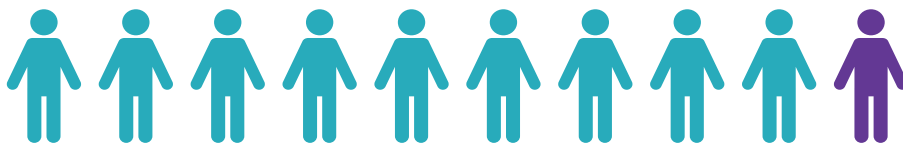
An overview of the most common gut health complaints reported in the research, with information about the research respondents' understanding of the symptoms associated with the condition.

Our research showed that **63%** of the population have experienced some sort of persistent gut complaint at some point in their lives. The most common gut health problems experienced were **constipation** and **diarrhoea**.

The most common gut problems experienced were:

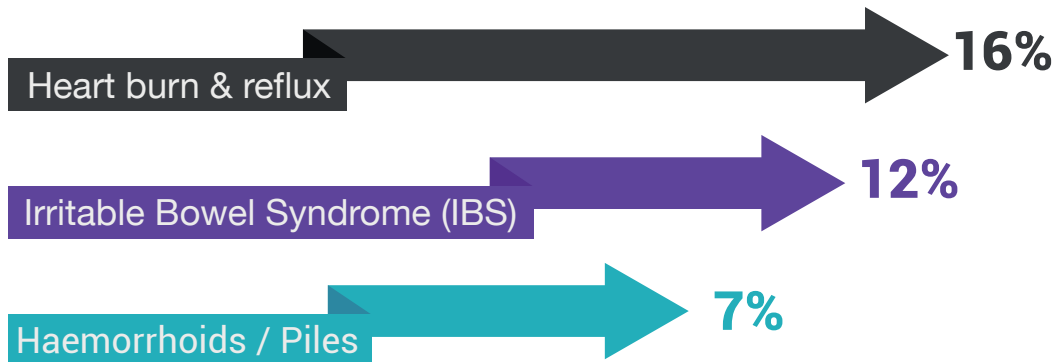


More than **one in ten (13%)** have also experienced blood in their stools.

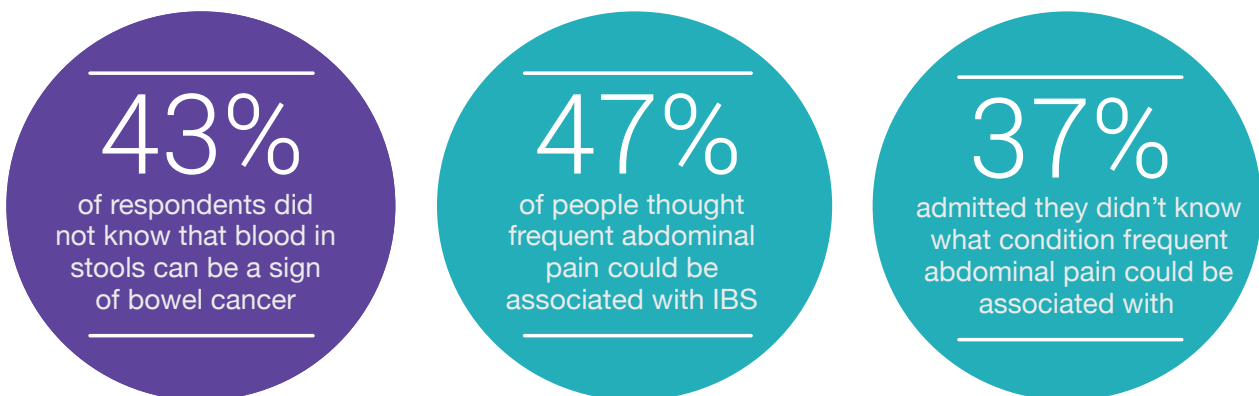


Identifying specific conditions

When it came to specific conditions – rather than symptoms - the research respondents identified themselves as having Heart burn and reflux, followed by Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) and Haemorrhoids / Piles.



The research also showed that significant numbers of people didn't know which gut symptoms were associated with which conditions, this may go some way to explaining why a number of people don't seek professional help.



Overall, IBS was the condition most likely to be referenced in association with digestive health complaints, but people were less sure when it came to conditions such as Crohn's Disease, Coeliac Disease or Colitis.

3. Barriers to seeking help

The reasons why people don't seek help for gut complaints

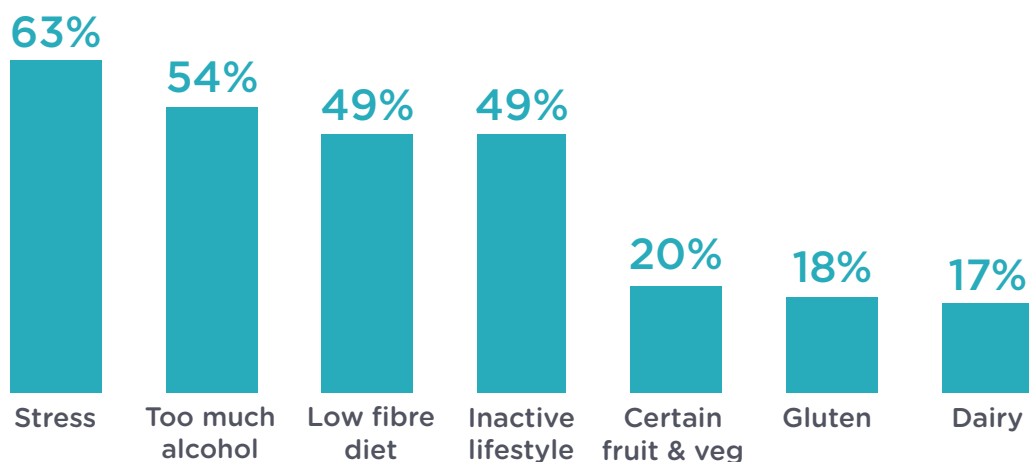
Of the **29%** (260 people) who have not sought medical help for their symptoms, **41%** said they thought it was nothing serious, **35%** self-diagnosed thinking it was their diet, **12%** felt research online was sufficient and **26%** put it down to stress.

Embarrassment is also a factor, with more than **one in ten (12%)** too embarrassed to talk to a medical professional.

The research also showed that it is **women** who are least likely to see a GP about digestive problems (**32%** haven't seen their GP) compared to **men (26%)**.

Of those who do seek help, **20%** admit to waiting 6-12 months and **13%** have experienced symptoms for more than a year before seeking professional advice.

When it comes to what people think can cause gut problems, the biggest reason that the survey respondents cited was stress (**63%**). Interestingly, drinking too much alcohol was second (**54%**) followed by various dietary and lifestyle factors.



Nutritionist Dr Joan Ransley said:



“Stress and diet can, of course, be closely linked to our gut health, but what is worrying is when people self-diagnose and start making changes to their diet without the advice of a medical professional. We would advise anyone experiencing frequent and ongoing gut health problems to see their GP in the first instance, who can help ensure that the right diagnosis and therefore treatment is given. Even if you think your problem is down to stress, it is still worth seeing your doctor if you experience ongoing problems - so they can rule out any other causes and potentially refer you to other health care professionals, if needed.”

4. The impact of gut problems

Gut complaints not only affect significant numbers of the population, but their impact on people's lives is significant. 1 in 5 people have had to take time off work due to their symptoms and over a quarter (28%) avoid going out. One in ten people have even suffered depression as a result of gut problems.

Laura, aged 31 said:

"I suffered with severe IBS for several years in my twenties. It made me feel really depressed and had a huge impact on my self-esteem. I worried about having an 'accident' at work and I became very anxious about any social engagements, in case I had an attack while I was there. Eating out became a nightmare and I was always worried about how my body would react to different foods. I dealt with the problems for a long time then eventually saw my GP and had a colonoscopy.

After this I was referred to a specialist dietitian who put me on the FODMAP diet. It took a lot of work to follow the diet and it made eating out difficult for the time I was following it, but it made a huge improvement to my condition and now I am rarely bothered by the IBS symptoms and can socialise and enjoy food freely. It's made a huge difference to my life."

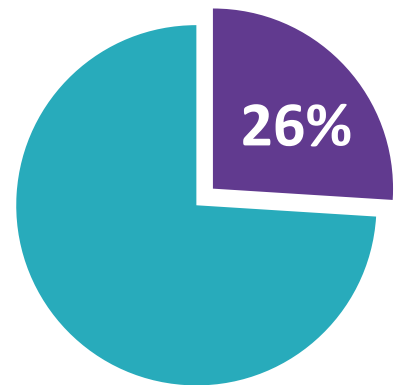
Paul was young, fit and athletic. So when he was diagnosed with Crohn's and told he needed a colostomy, he was devastated. *"Crohn's made me feel isolated and ashamed"* said Paul, but twenty years later, the dad of four from Birmingham is living pain-free with a stoma and has no regrets.

Becky said: *"My first ulcerative colitis flare was in June 2009 and it seemed to come out of nowhere. As soon as I noticed the symptoms I focused on restoring my health. I'm so pleased to report that I was able to get back to work at the end of November 2015. This was only possible because of the vast amount of speciality treatment, follow-up and support my medical team gave me since my final surgery in 2014."*

5. Gut complaints amongst different age groups

When it comes to who is experiencing gut complaints, interestingly, those aged 65+ showed the lowest incidences across all symptoms, except for **heart burn**. Just **8%** of people aged 65 and over said they have experienced constipation, compared to **51%** of those aged 25-34. Likewise, **7%** of the 65+ age group have experienced stomach pain but **26%** of people aged 18-24 have.

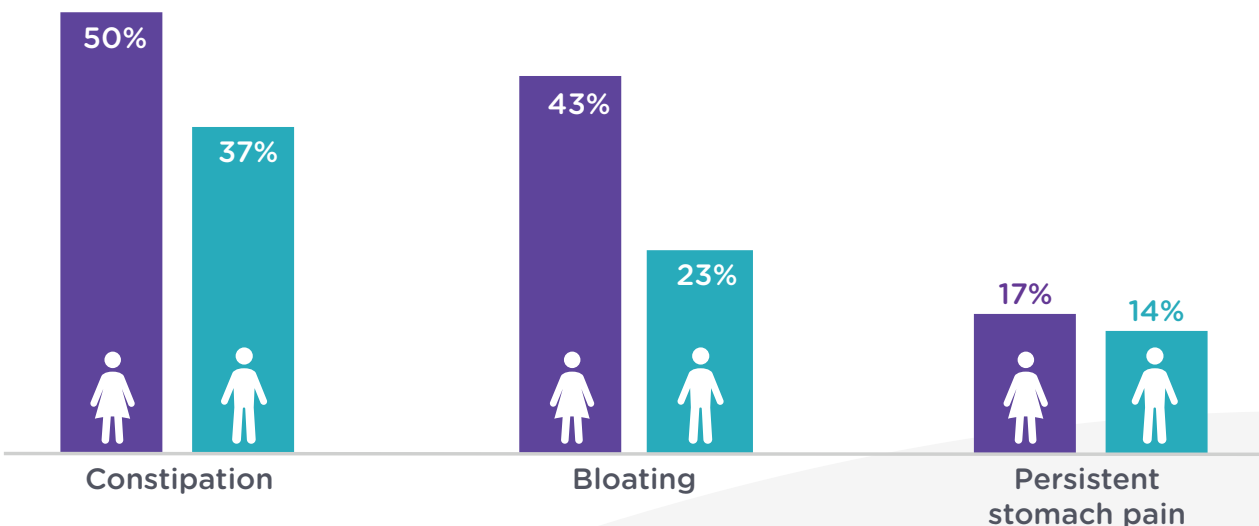
Overall, the age groups in this research most likely to report they experience gut health complaints are those in the middle age groups: ages 25-34, 35-44 and 45-54. The youngest age group aged (18-24) similar to the over 65s, generally show a low incidence of symptoms, with the exception of stomach pain when they report the highest incidence (**26%**). This is more than **double** the numbers who reported this in the other age groups.



26% of 18-24 year olds report experiencing stomach pain

6. Gut complaints – men vs. women

There are some interesting differences in the research between men and women. While the same percentage of men and women report experience diarrhoea and heart burn, significantly more women report having experienced constipation (**50%** of women versus **37%** of men), bloating (**43%** of women versus **23%** of men) and persistent stomach pain (**17%** of women, versus **14%** of men).



7. Keeping your gut healthy

Dr Joan Ransley, nutritionist from the Love Your Gut campaign, said:

“What this research shows is that gut health is something we should all be taking seriously. Gut problems can affect all of us at some point in our lives and when they do, it can be very distressing and have a huge impact on our day to day lives. Listening to your gut and being aware of what is normal for you is really important. Don’t ignore any ongoing or frequent symptoms and see a medical professional if you do experience ongoing problems. Something can usually be done and it’s important not to brush gut health issues under the carpet.”

If any of the following symptoms persist for more than a few days or for no obvious reason, make an appointment with your doctor:

- Abdominal pain before or after meals
- Feelings of fullness, bloating or flatulence
- Nausea or vomiting
- Heartburn or regurgitation
- Pain or difficulty in swallowing
- Loss of appetite
- Continuing unexplained weight loss
- Indigestion developing for the first time or in mid or later life
- Diarrhoea, constipation or any persistent alteration in bowel habit
- The passage of black tarry stools
- Bleeding when you pass a stool or blood and mucus mixed in with the stool
- Pain when you pass a stool
- Generally feeling tired, lethargic feverish or generally unwell in association with any abdominal symptoms.

Do not ignore repeated passage of blood in the stool, unexplained weight loss or an unexplained alteration in bowel habit if you are over the age of 50. We would strongly advise that you speak with your doctor as soon as possible.

Visit www.loveyourgut.com for more information about gut health and free resources.

8. References and background

The Love Your Gut Campaign is an initiative backed by a range of digestive health charities and organisations to help increase awareness and understanding of gut health. Our mission is to encourage people not to sweep gut health problems under the carpet and to be empowered to know when they need to seek professional help.

**This report is based on a survey of 2,000 UK and Ireland adults conducted in 2017 on behalf of the Love Your Gut Campaign.*