

The State Of The Nation's Gut

A report summarising the Love Your Gut 2018 research findings



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1. Overview

A summary of the key findings and the rationale behind the **Love Your Gut** campaign and its second annual report.

Most of the time, the gut works remarkably well, considering the variety of foods we put into it. However, if we are stressed or if we eat too much of any component of our diet, then it may 'complain' and we may develop gut symptoms. And just occasionally, these symptoms can be the sign of a medical disease involving the gut.

This report demonstrates how widespread gut health issues are and that people are suffering from a range of symptoms and complaints. Despite this however, many are not seeking the advice they should. Of the **48%** of people who are currently experiencing a chronic digestive problem or have done in the past, nearly **one in four** (24%) did not see a GP about the symptoms.

The Embarrassment Factor

The findings of the 2018 research show that one of the key reasons people are delaying seeing a doctor is embarrassment – indeed close to half of those in the UK (46%) and Ireland (47%) who put off seeking medical help for more than a month do so for this reason.

The report reveals embarrassment is widespread and affecting all areas of people's lives:



7% of respondents said they feel uncomfortable discussing their gut health with a GP or other medical professional.



8% had the same feeling about talking to their friends or colleagues.

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. It also shows that there is a need to help boost people's confidence in discussing digestive health, so a greater number are empowered to, and know when to, seek professional medical help.



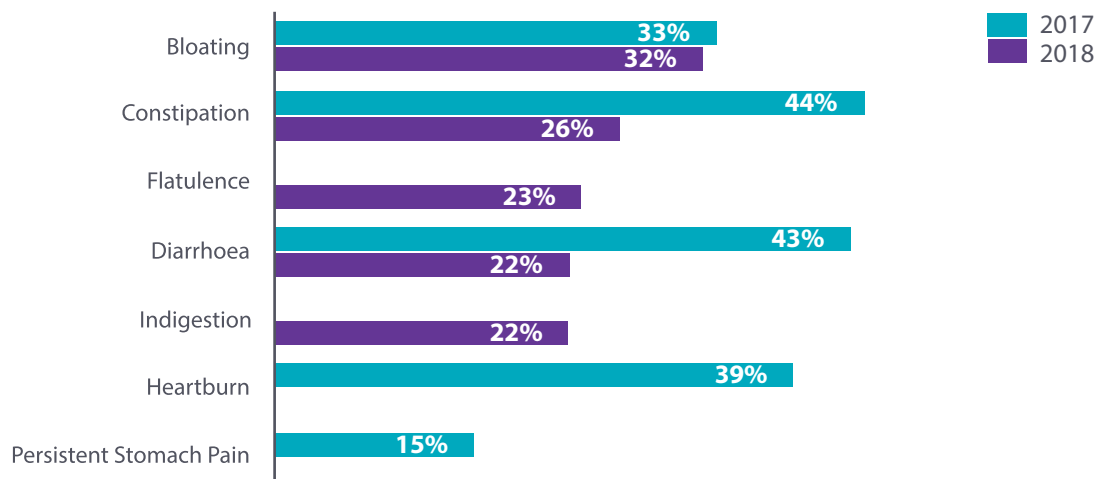
2. Most common health problems

An overview of the most common gut health complaints in 2018, as reported in the research, compared to 2017.

The research showed that this year 69% 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 bloating and constipation, compared to constipation and diarrhoea in 2017.

The most common gut problems experienced in 2018 compared to 2017, were:



One in five of those in the UK and Ireland have experienced frequent feelings of bloating.



Nearly **one in ten** (**7% of those in the UK and 10% in Ireland**) have experienced frequent feelings of sickness and nausea.

3. Identifying symptoms and seeking help

The report explored how many people in the UK and Ireland had suffered from specific gut health conditions and whether they had sought help for these.



Just **one in four** of those said they had sought medical advice for this. Around one in three said they ignored this symptom.



Of those, just a quarter stated that they sought medical advice yet over **40%** ignored it.



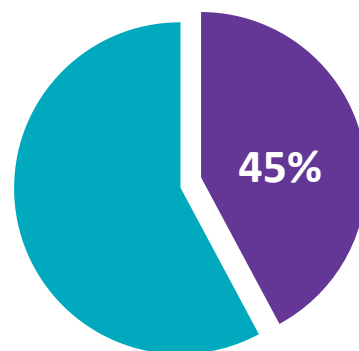
Around **one in three** sought medical advice for this but a similar number ignored the symptom.

4. Barriers to seeking help

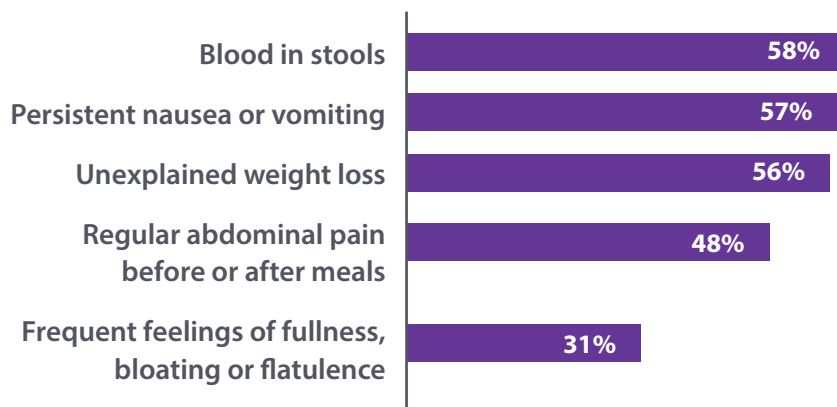
The reasons why people don't seek help for gut complaints

In 2018, of the one in four who delayed seeking professional help for a month or more, nearly three-quarters (**74%**) did so because they did not believe the symptoms were anything serious. 60% thought it was associated with diet and they could solve the problem themselves, and just over half (**52%**) thought it was due to stress.

45% said they did so because they felt worried or embarrassed about having an investigation.



When it comes to which symptoms people think you should seek medical advice for:



It is important to seek help for persistent problems and not let embarrassment put you off however.

As Jo Travers, Love Your Gut Dietitian says;

"I often see clients in the clinic that don't know where to begin with describing their symptoms, but there's really no need for embarrassment. For health care professionals it's something we discuss all the time so we are very comfortable talking about all of the digestive complaints. A large percentage of the people with bloating, diarrhoea and constipation etc. see huge improvements in their symptoms when they do seek help so it's well worth it."

5. Gut talk: the embarrassment factor

Based on age, location, and between men and women

The 2018 research showed differences in the levels of embarrassment discussing gut health by age, location and between men and women.

Women are more embarrassed to discuss their gut health with a medical professional than men. Nearly **1 in 10** (9%) women admit feeling uncomfortable doing so but just **1 in 20** (5%) men said they felt uncomfortable.

It seems we grow more comfortable discussing our gut health with age. The older generation are most comfortable with just **3%** of those aged over 65 feeling embarrassed to discuss this with a medical professional, compared to **1 in 10** (9%) 18-24 year olds.

Embarrassment about discussing gut health varies across the UK. Those in the North East are least concerned, with just **3%** feeling uncomfortable talking to a GP and those in Scotland are the most embarrassed - with **17%** nervous to discuss gut health. Around one in **20** (6%) of those in London and the South East (5%) feel embarrassed talking to their GP.



One in three of the 2018 respondents said they would feel more comfortable talking about gut health if doctors and nurses were to use less medical jargon.

28% of women and **33% of men** said this would help.

6. The impact of gut problems

The Embarrassment Factor: case studies

Gut complaints not only affect significant numbers of the population, but their impact on people's lives can be extensive. In 2018 nearly **one in five** (17%) people have had to take time off work due to their symptoms and **over a quarter** (27%) avoided going out. Nearly **one in 10 people** (9%) have even suffered depression as a result of gut problems.

"The embarrassment factor is a major issue for those of us with IBS. Asking to use a toilet in a shop or cafe and having to wait while a debate ensues as to whether to allow you in when YOU NEED TO GO RIGHT NOW!! Even worse is not making it in time!"

Patient with IBS

"I think raising awareness and reducing embarrassment/taboo is more important in getting people the right treatment early, rather than funding research, which is expensive and may help fewer people."

Caregiver of patient with achalasia

Tom aged 27, said

"'Toilet talk' is still seen as quite taboo and embarrassing to the general public. Even having IBS myself and speaking openly about it... I still cringe and can't bring myself to write 'taking a poo' as if it is a 'dirty' or 'unclean' word.

Unfortunately, though I have found people to confide in, there are countless others who have no one to turn to in comfort of their condition. This can make it incredibly difficult for people to cope with the various ways IBS can manifest itself... I figured out a long time ago that, by making a joke of my condition, rather than feeling ashamed of it, I released its stranglehold on me mentally."

"It is so difficult to explain to other people - too embarrassing, and people just do not want to know." Patient with IBS

7. Gut complaints amongst different age groups

A study between men and women

When it comes to who is experiencing gut complaints, interestingly the 2018 research revealed that those aged 65+ experienced the lowest levels of gut health issues, except for frequent heart burn. Just **1% of people aged 65 and over** said they have experienced sudden and persistent loss of appetite compared to **13% of those aged 18-24**.

Overall, those most likely to report they experience gut health complaints were younger adults in the 18-24 and 25-34 age groups. Amongst these, frequent feelings of bloating are the most common ailment with **41% of 18 to 24-year-olds** suffering and **36% of 25 to 34-year-olds**.

This was also the symptom suffered most commonly by both men and women, with **25% of men** and **39% women** reporting that they had experienced this. The next most common gut health problems **reported by men** were **indigestion** (23%) and **flatulence** (22%) **and for women** these were **constipation** (32%) and **diarrhoea** (24%).



1 in 3 women reported that they suffered from constipation, compared to just **1 in 5 men**

8. Keeping your gut healthy

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**
- **Continued unexplained weight loss**
- **Bleeding when you pass a stool or blood and mucus mixed in with the stool**
- **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**
- **Pain when you pass a stool**
- **Generally feeling tired, lethargic, feverish or generally unwell in association with any abdominal symptoms**

Visit www.loveyourgut.com for more information about gut health and free resources including a Digestive Health Assessment tool and Love Your Gut Food & Symptom Diary. Both can be used to monitor and assess gut health and as a starting point for conversations with medical professionals.

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 to your doctor as soon as possible.

Finally, it is important not to put off seeking help due to embarrassment. As **Anton Emmanuel, Love Your Gut Week Spokesperson**, Consultant Gastroenterologist at University College Hospital in London and Medical Director for Guts UK says;

"Symptoms arising from the gut are at once very personal and potentially embarrassing, but on the other hand also very public, in that they often cause patients to cancel appointments, avoid certain situations, change their wardrobe, miss out on social meals. Seeking help to overcome the taboo can help get an earlier diagnosis (and hence more successful treatment) of worrying conditions, but also help find early remedies for the commoner simple diagnoses".

9. 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 year's annual **Love Your Gut Week** will take place **17th-23rd September 2018** highlighting the vital role of the digestive system and emphasising the importance of good gut health by educating the public. As well as hints and tips from Love Your Gut dietitian Jo Travers and recipes from Dr Joan Ransley, 2018 will see the launch of the annual '**State of the Nation's Gut**' report*, a Digestive Health Assessment tool, a Food and Symptom Diary and a dedicated Love Your Gut Facebook Group.

***This report is based on a survey of 2,079 respondents across the UK and Republic of Ireland (1829 UK/250 ROI) between 7th and 10th August 2018, on behalf of the Love Your Gut campaign.**

For more information visit www.loveyourgut.com



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