

7 Spices That Can Help Reduce Bloating

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › A variety of spices helps to relieve bloating by improving gut motility, stimulating digestion and relieving gas
- › Fennel seeds are considered a natural remedy for digestive disorders, including heartburn, bloating, gas and even chronic conditions like inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)
- › Ginger also has a long history of use as a natural digestive aid, useful for relieving nausea, indigestion, bloating and more
- › Cumin essential oil has even shown promise for relieving the symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome, including stomach pain and bloating
- › Pepper is traditionally used as a carminative agent to help relieve gas as well as stimulate gastric secretions

Bloating and a distended abdomen are among the most common gastrointestinal complaints. The symptoms of trapped gas in your stomach along with abdominal pressure and fullness are often accompanied by distension, or an increase in your abdomen's girth.¹ Bloating may occur on its own or alongside other gastrointestinal disorders, such as indigestion, irritable bowel syndrome and constipation.

Its causes are also varied, ranging from food intolerances to problems with intestinal microbiota. Resolving bloating requires addressing its root cause, whether that be dietary changes or constipation relief. However, nature is also full of compounds with

anti-bloating properties.² For the estimated 30% of adults who experience bloating on occasion,³ adding the following spices to your diet may be just what the doctor ordered.

7 Top Spices to Relieve Bloating

Herbs and spices work to relieve bloating via multiple mechanisms. For instance, impaired abdominal emptying is one reason why bloating happens,⁴ and some spices work by targeting gut motility. Other spices help with digestion and improving gut health. Including a range of spices in your meals may therefore offer both protection against and relief from bloating. Some of the top options to consider follow.

1. **Fennel** – Chewing fennel seeds after a meal is a common practice in southeast Asia and many other parts of the world, as the licorice-flavored seeds are considered a natural remedy for digestive disorders, including heartburn, bloating, gas and even chronic conditions like inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).⁵

The Northwest School for Botanical Studies also counts fennel as “one of the most effective digestive aids,” calling out its gas-relieving, antispasmodic and stomachic – or beneficial to the stomach – properties.⁶ In a monograph on fennel, it’s explained how various parts of the plant come together to form a near-perfect herb for digestive health:

“It [fennel] is highly beneficial to reduce digestive cramping, gas, and bloating. The volatile oils contained in the seed stimulate the mucus membranes in the digestive tract, encouraging motility and peristalsis. The aromatic oils also exert smooth muscle antispasmodic and carminative actions.

The seed tincture or tea is effective for treating intestinal spasms that result from conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, ulcerative colitis, Crohn’s disease, leaky gut syndrome, Celiac disease, and intestinal candidiasis.

Fennel's properties pass through breast milk, reducing infant colic. Fennel seed has anti-nauseant properties, aiding recovery from stomach flu, food poisoning, digestive infections, and hangovers."

You can chew fennel seeds on their own or, for a simple fennel tea, steep 1 to 2 teaspoons of freshly crushed fennel seeds in 1 cup of boiling water for five to 10 minutes. Strain the seeds, then enjoy this natural remedy for digestive support.

- 2. Ginger** — Ginger also has a long history of use as a natural digestive aid, useful for relieving nausea, indigestion, bloating and more. With known anti-inflammatory and antiulcer effects,⁷ ginger may also help with the impaired gastric emptying that can contribute to feelings of bloating, fullness and belching.

One study involving ginger extract found the supplement improved gastrointestinal motility, while other research showed ginger accelerates gastric emptying and stimulates antral — the lower part of the stomach — contractions.⁸

Writing in Food Science & Nutrition, researchers explained, "Ginger as an important dietary agent which possesses carminative effect, decreases pressure on lower esophageal sphincter, reduces intestinal cramping, and prevents dyspepsia, flatulence, and bloating."⁹ Some of ginger's benefits for gastrointestinal motility are due to gingerol, a compound that increases the rate that food exits your stomach and continues on with digestion.

According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, "Eating ginger can cut down on fermentation, constipation and other causes of bloating and intestinal gas."¹⁰

- 3. Cumin** — Cumin's warm, earthy flavor plays a starring role in many spice blends, including chili powder, garam masala, sofrito and baharat, while medicinally it's long been used to aid digestion, support breastfeeding and treat health problems including fever, diarrhea and vomiting.¹¹

Cumin essential oil has even shown promise for relieving the symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome, including stomach pain and bloating.¹² While 54% of patients in

one study had severe bloating, 46% had moderate bloating; after four weeks of treatment with cumin extract, no patients had severe bloating and only 8% had moderate bloating.

“Cumin extract can be effective in improving all IBS symptoms,” the team concluded, adding that it’s also low in cost with widespread availability.¹³ Cumin also stimulates bile production,¹⁴ which supports healthy digestion.

4. Black pepper – Pepper is traditionally used as a carminative agent to help relieve gas as well as stimulate gastric secretions.¹⁵ This “king of spices” was also historically valued for other gastrointestinal purposes, including to relieve vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhea.

It’s now known that piperine in pepper stimulates the release of digestive enzymes from the pancreas,¹⁶ along with offering antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties while altering gastrointestinal disorders.¹⁷

There’s also some evidence that suggests black pepper plays a role in gut health by altering the makeup of intestinal microbiota and possibly acting as a prebiotic.¹⁸

Black pepper has the unique ability to synergistically interact with nutrients, increasing their absorption.¹⁹

For best results, choose whole peppercorns and grind them fresh when you need them. Dried peppercorns can stay fresh for three to four years, especially if stored in a cool, dark place away from direct sunlight or heat.²⁰ However, once ground, pepper will gradually lose some of its flavor and potency.

5. Cinnamon – Cinnamon is another warming spice that was traditionally used for indigestion, gas and bloating. In Ayurvedic medicine, cinnamon is considered a digestive remedy,²¹ and it may support gut health. In one study, consuming capsules of spices – specifically cinnamon, oregano, ginger, black pepper and cayenne pepper – favorably affected gut bacterial composition after two weeks.²²

When choosing cinnamon, be aware that there are about 250 species of cinnamon around the world.²³ *Cinnamomum verum*, which is native to Sri Lanka, is known as Ceylon cinnamon, and its name translates to “true cinnamon.” Cassia is darker and has a stronger flavor, while Ceylon is lighter in color with a more delicate flavor.²⁴

While Ceylon is less common than Cassia cinnamon and therefore tends to be more expensive and harder to find, it’s considered to be a “richer spice”²⁵ and, importantly, contains lower levels of a chemical called coumarin, a powerful anticoagulant with potentially carcinogenic and toxic properties.

Cassia cinnamon can contain up to 1% coumarin while Ceylon typically contains only trace amounts (about 0.004%).²⁶ Using cassia as a dietary spice does not pose significant health challenges. However, when considering cinnamon as a dietary supplement in larger doses, it is important to seek out Ceylon cinnamon that has less coumarin than cassia and is therefore less likely to cause liver injury.

To make a simple cinnamon tea to help relieve bloating, place one cinnamon stick in 1.5 cups of hot water in a pot on the stove. Bring the water to a slow boil over medium-low heat, which should take about 15 to 25 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat and let it cool for about 15 minutes. Strain the tea, then sip it at your leisure.

- 6. Coriander seeds** – Coriander seeds are an aromatic spice with a taste similar to caraway that add flavor to dishes while acting as a digestive agent that accelerates the digestion process.²⁷ Coriander may also increase the production of stomach acid, helping to promote healthy digestion while relieving indigestion, constipation and gas.²⁸ For bloating relief, try soaking coriander seeds in a glass of water overnight, then drinking the water in the morning.²⁹
- 7. Cardamom** – Cardamom, a spice with a flavor reminiscent of cinnamon and nutmeg, belongs to the ginger family and is often found in curry dishes. With a range of beneficial properties such as antibacterial, antioxidant and anti-inflammatory, cardamom is regarded as a remedy for indigestion.³⁰

Regarded as the “queen of spices,” cardamom is a natural carminative agent, useful for easing gas and bloating. To use it for this purpose, try drinking a cup of cardamom tea 30 minutes before a meal.³¹

Papaya Also Offers Natural Digestive Support

The seven spices above aren’t an exhaustive list of natural, anti-bloating agents. There are many others to choose from, including papaya, which contains papain, a powerful proteolytic enzyme. While proteolytic enzymes act as natural anticoagulants by breaking down fibrin that forms blood clots, papain is a natural digestive enzyme that’s historically been used not only for improving digestion but also to relieve pain, inflammation and diarrhea.³²

As such, papaya — traditionally known as a “fruit of long life”³³ — has long been prized as a remedy for abnormal digestion by those living in tropical and industrialized countries alike.³⁴ A randomized controlled trial published in *Neuro Endocrinology Letters* looked into the use of a papaya preparation in people with ingestion and dysfunction of the gastrointestinal tract.

“Former clinical observations had revealed positive effects for patients with constipation, heartburn, and symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) after eating papaya preparations,” the team noted.³⁵

For the study, subjects consumed 20 milliliters of papaya preparation for 40 days, which led to significant improvements in constipation and bloating. “We conclude from these results, that the papaya preparation ... contributes to the maintenance of digestive tract physiology. It ameliorates various functional disturbances, like symptoms of IBS [irritable bowel syndrome],” according to the researchers.³⁶

Papain also has antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, which show promise for reducing symptoms of inflammatory bowel diseases. In an animal study of rats with intestinal inflammation, papain, as well as bromelain, led to decreased symptoms and reduced biomarkers of oxidative stress and proinflammatory cytokines.³⁷

Asafoetida Relieves Bloating, Too

The Indian cooking spice [asafoetida](#), a gum obtained from a type of giant fennel, is also worthy of attention if bloating is a concern for you. With its pungent onion-garlic flavor, you can use it as a substitute for either of those ingredients. Many recommend using it in bean-based dishes, as it helps prevent gassiness.³⁸ Its ability to cut gas is attributed to antibacterial compounds that impede the activity of gut bacteria responsible for flatulence.³⁹

Another study looking at asafoetida's effects on functional dyspepsia (FD), a chronic disorder of the upper digestive tract, found it to be both safe and effective, including for bloating relief.⁴⁰ The beauty of using herbs and spices in your meals is that they support health from various angles. They'll not only support healthy digestion and reduce bloating but will also boost your heart health,⁴¹ lower diabetes risk,⁴² protect your liver⁴³ and more.

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