

Survey: Over Half of Americans Think Stomach Issues Are Normal

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Over half of Americans (51%) mistakenly believe digestive issues like bloating and gas are normal, which allows serious underlying gut problems to persist
- A national survey found 44% of Americans experience digestive discomfort within two hours of eating, yet 75% have never heard of small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO)
- Among patients diagnosed with IBS, 41% report their doctors never mentioned SIBO as a possible cause, despite research suggesting two-thirds of IBS patients have undiagnosed SIBO
- Rather than treating symptoms with antibiotics, which worsen the underlying problem, addressing your gut's underlying environment and bacterial balance is essential for long-term relief
- Healing gut issues requires temporarily avoiding fiber and complex carbs, supporting metabolism with appropriate carbohydrates like white rice and fruit, and restoring thyroid function and hormonal balance

You've been told that bloating is normal. That gas after meals, a tight waistline by afternoon or the need to unbutton your pants is just part of getting older, eating fast or being "sensitive." But these everyday annoyances aren't just a nuisance — they're a signal. And if you've brushed them off for months or even years, you're not alone.

Digestive discomfort has quietly become one of the most ignored health issues in the U.S. You feel off, but you keep going. You try cutting dairy or sipping tea but nothing works. Maybe you've even been told it's stress or hormones. And yet, every day, your gut reminds you something still isn't right.

What's missing for most people is a basic understanding of what their gut symptoms really mean. These signals — bloating, urgency, inconsistent bowel habits — aren't random. They reflect a deeper disruption in your gut's internal environment, one that affects not just digestion, but your energy, immunity and even your mood.

In the following sections, you'll discover what's actually driving this modern gut crisis and, more importantly, how to get your system back on track. You'll learn what the latest data reveals about misdiagnosis, why probiotics and fiber are not helping, and which proven strategies are finally bringing people lasting relief.

Most Americans Misunderstand Their Gut Symptoms

A survey conducted by Censuswide set out to explore how Americans perceive their digestive symptoms and whether they understand the root causes behind them.¹ The survey, which involved 2,000 adults across the U.S., was released in recognition of National SIBO Awareness Day.

Small intestinal bacterial overgrowth, or SIBO, is characterized by an excessive buildup of bacteria in the small intestine, leading to gas, bloating, pain, irregular bowel movements and nutrient malabsorption.

- **More than half surveyed thought gut symptoms were normal** — The survey uncovered that 51% of Americans believe symptoms like bloating, gas and abdominal discomfort are just a part of life. This suggests that half the population is normalizing signs of poor digestive health, allowing more serious issues to go undetected and untreated.

- **Millions experience symptoms daily, but few get the right diagnosis** — According to the report, 44% of Americans said they experience bloating or discomfort within just two hours of eating, a telltale sign of bacterial imbalance in the gut.

Despite this, 75% said they had never heard of SIBO, a common but often overlooked root cause of these symptoms. Some patients are misdiagnosed with **irritable bowel syndrome** (IBS) and never tested for SIBO, which requires a specific breath test that many conventional providers still don't offer.

- **Most patients diagnosed with IBS were not told about SIBO** — Among those who said they had received an IBS diagnosis, 41% reported that their doctor never mentioned SIBO as a possible cause.

That omission is serious, because research now estimates that two-thirds of IBS patients have undiagnosed SIBO. This oversight delays proper treatment and allows the bacterial overgrowth to worsen, causing further inflammation and immune dysfunction throughout the body.

- **Patients feel ignored and dismissed by health care providers** — The emotional toll of being brushed off is also clear in the findings: 27% of respondents said they feel dismissed when trying to talk about their digestive symptoms with a medical provider. This occurs even though these physical experiences — bloating, stomach pain, urgency to run to the bathroom, gas and alternating diarrhea or constipation — disrupt daily life.
- **People are searching for solutions but don't know where to start** — The survey found that 20% of Americans think probiotics alone are enough to fix gut health problems. But in cases of SIBO, probiotics sometimes worsen symptoms by adding more bacteria to an already overpopulated small intestine.
- **A breakdown in the doctor-patient relationship is worsening outcomes** — What this survey reveals is not just a gap in knowledge, but a breakdown in trust. When patients feel dismissed and left without options, they stop asking questions and suffer in silence.

Meanwhile, doctors miss key diagnoses like SIBO because they're not trained to look for them. It's a failure on both ends — one that's easily corrected by better testing, improved education and a shift in how we think about gut health.

Stop Treating Symptoms in Isolation and Start Restoring Your Gut Terrain

If you're dealing with daily bloating, gas, stomach pain or bathroom urgency, your body isn't just reacting to a food choice — it's reacting to a microbial imbalance inside your gut. You aren't broken. Your inner environment has shifted in a way that favors harmful bacteria over the ones you need. And until you change that internal terrain, the symptoms will keep coming back no matter what you try.

The real problem starts when the wrong bacteria overgrow where they shouldn't, leading to low butyrate production. **Butyrate** is one of the most powerful healing compounds your body makes inside your colon. It fuels the cells that seal up your gut lining, calms immune overactivation and reduces whole-body inflammation. But you can't produce butyrate without specific microbes.

These important bacteria feed on fermentable fibers found in foods like cooked-and-cooled potatoes, green bananas, Jerusalem artichokes, lentils and oats — but you should only consume fiber-rich foods once your gut is stable enough to handle fiber safely. That's the fiber paradox: fiber is necessary, but if you consume it when your gut is unhealthy, it makes symptoms worse.

Another key player, *Akkermansia muciniphila*, supports butyrate producers by strengthening your mucus layer and protecting your gut lining. Think of *Akkermansia* as the gatekeeper and butyrate producers as the builders. Together, they rebuild a resilient, anti-inflammatory microbiome. Here's where I recommend you start:

- 1. Assess your gut health before making any changes** — Before you jump into changing your diet, stop and take inventory. Ask yourself these key questions:

- Do you have a long list of food intolerances?
- Do you bloat or experience pain after eating fiber-rich foods?
- Do you go a day or more without a bowel movement?
- Do you suffer from chronic diarrhea or loose stools?

If you answered yes to at least three of these, your gut is in a highly compromised state. Don't panic — this is actually good information. It means you know what you're working with, and you can now take targeted steps to heal.

2. Avoid fiber and complex carbs until your gut calms down — When your gut is out of balance, high-fiber foods — even the "healthy" ones — work against you. Foods like beans, lentils, oats and raw greens ferment quickly when the wrong bacteria are in control. This creates gas, pressure and inflammation, and worsens gut lining damage.

Early on, your gut needs simplicity to heal. Choose easy-to-digest foods like whole fruit and white rice. These provide steady fuel without feeding bacterial overgrowth. As symptoms ease, you'll carefully expand your diet to include more complex foods, but rushing this step will set you back fast.

3. Choose carbs that nourish your cells without feeding invaders — Your small intestine's job is to absorb nutrients, not ferment them. When you eat complex carbs that linger, harmful bacteria seize the opportunity. Rapidly absorbed carbs like white rice and whole fruits pass through before bacteria ferment them, lowering endotoxin production and inflammation.

As your gut heals, begin layering in starches like peeled potatoes or cooked squash. Later, move toward root vegetables and, finally, more fibrous foods. The long-term goal is a diverse, **fiber-rich diet** — but only after your gut terrain is ready to support it safely.

4. Reset your internal terrain that allowed the overgrowth — Bacterial overgrowth is a symptom of imbalance. Pathogens thrive when your environment favors them. Factors like [estrogen-dominant environments](#), [excess iron](#), [low thyroid function](#) and constant exposure to vegetable oils and xenoestrogens from plastics create the perfect breeding ground.

Antibiotics often make this worse by wiping out helpful bacteria and allowing candida and other yeast to spread unchecked. To create lasting change, start by cleaning up your environment, balancing your iron and hormones, and supporting your thyroid. If your inner world is healthy, the wrong microbes can't get a foothold.

5. Track your body temperature to spot hidden weaknesses — Low body temperature is a hidden sign that your metabolism, and your immune defenses, are underperforming. Fungal overgrowth like candida thrives in a cool, sluggish body. Start tracking your temperature first thing in the morning and again in the afternoon.

If your daytime readings consistently fall below 98.6 degrees F, it's time to rebuild mitochondrial energy. Focus on steady [healthy carb intake](#) and regular [sun exposure](#). Restoring normal body temperature is one of the simplest, clearest signs that your gut and your whole system are moving back toward health.

FAQs About SIBO and Gut Problems

Q: Why do so many people think stomach problems are normal?

A: More than half of Americans have been led to believe that bloating, gas and digestive discomfort are just part of everyday life. This false assumption often keeps people from recognizing serious gut issues. A national survey found that 51% of adults normalize these symptoms, which are actually signs of microbial imbalance in the small intestine.

Q: What is SIBO, and why is it often missed by doctors?

A: SIBO happens when bacteria that should stay in your large intestine overpopulate your small intestine. It's commonly misdiagnosed as IBS because few practitioners test for it. In fact, 75% of survey respondents had never even heard of SIBO, and 41% of those diagnosed with IBS said their doctor never mentioned it as a possible cause.

Q: How do symptoms of SIBO show up in daily life?

A: The most common red flags include bloating, stomach pain, excessive gas, diarrhea or constipation, and urgent bathroom trips. These symptoms are caused by bacteria fermenting food in the wrong part of your digestive tract, which leads to inflammation and nutrient loss.

Q: Why don't standard treatments work for chronic gut issues?

A: Conventional treatments often miss the mark because they treat surface symptoms without addressing the underlying terrain. Many people rely on antibiotics or restrictive diets that either worsen symptoms or offer only temporary relief. A root-cause approach focuses on restoring metabolic health, removing bacterial triggers and strengthening digestive defenses.

Q: What's the best way to start healing your gut naturally?

A: Stop feeding the overgrowth with fiber and hard-to-digest carbs, and begin nourishing your gut cells with simple, easily absorbed carbohydrates like white rice and fruit. Support your thyroid, stabilize your body temperature and avoid vegetable

oils and environmental toxins like plastics. Once your gut is calm, slowly reintroduce more complex foods while keeping daily carb intake around 250 grams for steady healing.

Sources and References

- ¹ [PR Newswire April 8, 2025](#)