

THE BELLY BLOAT CURE

WIN THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE
IN JUST THREE DAYS—FLAT!

BY JENNIFER ABBASI

Muffin top. Belly pooch. Jelly roll. The names we come up with may be cute, but the impression tight waistbands leave on your stomach isn't. Thankfully, you can give the button on your jeans a break by avoiding foods that are hard to digest, cause you to retain water or produce excess gas. We cut back on these midriff offenders in our bloat-busting menu, created by Maggie Moon, R.D., an instructor at Brooklyn College's department of health and nutrition sciences. "You could see an inch of difference in just three days," says Moon. "You'll also reduce inflammation, a condition linked to heart disease, cancer and diabetes." That's because fried and salty meals get the boot on this plan. Turns out trimming your tummy is good for your whole body.



YOUR 3-DAY MEAL PLAN

For a real gut reaction, we're watching calories—there's about 1,800 per day—and requiring 30 minutes of activity (walking, biking) daily. Feel free to swap meals from different pages, and pick your beverage (tea or water with cucumber or lemon) for each dish. Skip the A.M. snack or dessert for better results, and go to familycircle.com/antibloat for the dinner recipes.

DAY 1

→ BREAKFAST

target calories

350-400

1 cup plain nonfat Greek yogurt or cottage cheese topped with 1 cup cornflakes, plus 8 oz 100% orange juice, no pulp

→ MIDMORNING SNACK

target calories

250-300

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup unsweetened applesauce with 1 oz almonds (24 nuts)

→ LUNCH

target calories

350-400

One 4-oz lean turkey burger patty with 1 cup zucchini sautéed in vegetable oil and 1 cup smooth tomato sauce

→ MIDAFTERNOON SNACK

target calories

200-250

1 brown-rice cake topped with 1 tablespoon smooth peanut butter and as many halved grapes as will fit on top

→ EVENING SNACK

target calories

100-200

Low-fat vanilla pudding garnished with a few dark-chocolate shavings and toasted almond slivers

→ DINNER

target calories

350-400

4 oz sautéed skinless chicken strips with 1 cup stir-fry slices of red, orange and green bell peppers served over $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked white rice



TUMMY TROUBLES

If our plan doesn't whittle your middle and PMS isn't to blame, it could be...

FOOD

INTOLERANCE →

Both lactose intolerance (in which the body has trouble digesting a sugar in dairy) and celiac disease (a reaction to gluten, a protein in wheat, barley and rye) can lead to gas and bloating. If you're lactose intolerant, switch to lactose-free products or take Lactaid pills, which help break down lactose. A gluten-free diet manages celiac disease.

GASTROINTESTINAL CONDITION →

If you have symptoms like cramping and abdominal pain, your doctor may check for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or inflammatory bowel diseases, such as ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.

MEDICATION →

Some over-the-counter and prescription drugs—painkillers containing codeine and certain diabetes meds, for example—may cause bloating, gas and diarrhea. In addition, antidiarrheal meds, fiber supplements and bulking agents can also trigger bloat.

STRESS →

Frazzled folks (aka moms) are more likely to smoke, eat too quickly and feast on fatty, salty comfort foods, all bulge-inducing habits. Make time for healthy meals and your stomach will be one less thing to worry about.

THE B(LOAT) LIST

Six troublemakers that widen your waistline

FIBER →

It does help move food through your digestive system and reduce bloating. But eat too much and it absorbs water and causes gas. So consider temporarily cutting back on beans and cruciferous vegetables, such as broccoli and cabbage.

SALT →

"It's like a magnet to water," says Bonnie Taub-Dix, R.D., author of *Read It Before You Eat It* (Plume) and a member of the Family Circle Health Advisory Board. Skip packaged meals and banish the salt shaker from the dinner table.

FAT →

Pizza and chips get eaten quickly, but they linger in your stomach because fat is hard to digest. That means more time for your body to create bloat-inducing gas.

STARCH →

Give the mashed potatoes a break. The carbs in corn, pasta and bread, for example, can also be hard to break down.

CARBONATION →

The bubbles in soda and even seltzer mean more gas in your stomach.

SWEETENERS THAT END IN "OL" →

Check labels for sugar alcohols, such as sorbitol and xylitol, commonly used in sugar-free chewing gum, hard candy, diet soda and diabetic foods. These hard-to-digest substitutes can cause gas and diarrhea.

DAY 2

→ BREAKFAST

target calories

350-400

2 scrambled eggs cooked with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup frozen chopped spinach and dried or fresh chopped herbs to taste, plus 1 slice white toast with 1 tablespoon vegetable oil soft spread

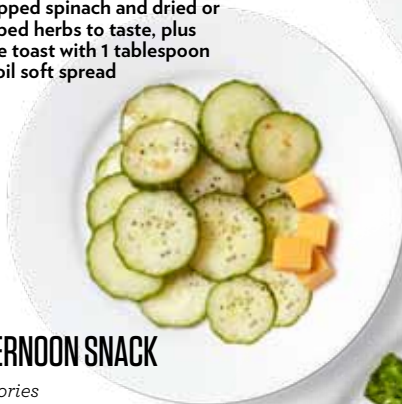


→ MIDAFTERNOON SNACK

target calories

200-250

1 cup cucumber slices in 2 tablespoons Italian dressing topped with freshly cracked pepper and 1 oz cubed cheddar (size of 2 dice)



→ EVENING SNACK

target calories

100-200

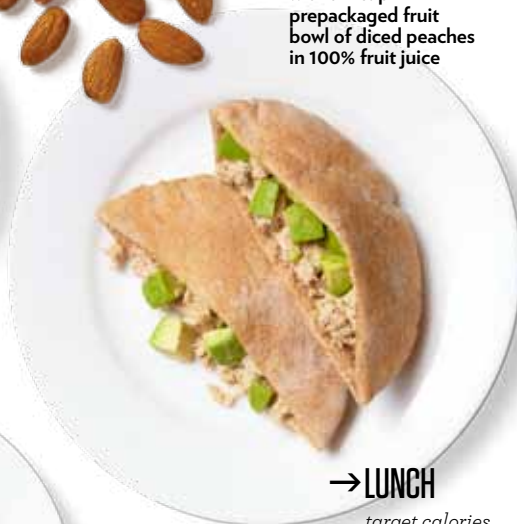
$\frac{1}{2}$ cup low-fat cottage cheese with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sautéed apples topped with cinnamon

→ MIDMORNING SNACK

target calories

250-300

1 oz almonds (24 nuts) with a 1-cup prepackaged fruit bowl of diced peaches in 100% fruit juice



→ LUNCH

target calories

350-400

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup tuna salad with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup avocado cubes in a white or multigrain pita pocket

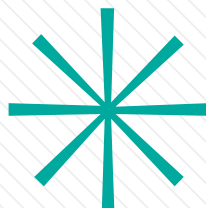


→ DINNER

target calories

350-400

One 4-oz piece baked or broiled salmon over $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cooked rice with a side of 1 cup sautéed spinach



5 BAD BEHAVIORS These habits have one thing in common: They make you swallow air. Hard to believe, but experts agree they all contribute to belly bloating.

- EATING QUICKLY
- CHEWING GUM
- SUCKING ON HARD CANDIES
- DRINKING THROUGH A STRAW
- SMOKING

DAY 3

→ BREAKFAST

target calories

350-400

PB&J smoothie made with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup unsweetened almond milk, 3 tablespoons peanut butter and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup unsweetened applesauce

→ MIDAFTERNOON SNACK

target calories

200-250

2 tablespoons dark-chocolate chips with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup high-protein granola

→ EVENING SNACK

target calories

100-200

Wedges of one mango brushed with canola oil, broiled and garnished with fresh lime zest

→ MIDMORNING SNACK

target calories

250-300

1 very ripe pear and 1 stick string cheese plus 1-2 servings crispbread (superthin) crackers

→ LUNCH

target calories

350-400

One 3-oz grilled skinless chicken breast over 1 cup spinach sautéed with vegetable oil, with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked brown rice and carrot-ginger dressing

→ DINNER

target calories

350-400

1 fillet broiled flounder over 3 cups of kale, fennel and grapefruit salad with 2 tablespoons olive oil-red wine vinegar dressing



OOPS! NOW WHAT?

So you picked up a bucket of fried chicken as a quick fix for dinner and now you're filled (literally) with regret. Here, seven tricks to bring down that bulge.

- **Take a hike.** Going for a quick walk around the block will reduce the water you're retaining, dissipate some of the air and speed up digestion. What won't work: Doing sit-ups and crunches. "You can't spot-reduce bloat," says Felicia Stoler, R.D., a doctor of clinical nutrition, an exercise physiologist and the author of *Living Skinny in Fat Genes: The Healthy Way to Lose Weight and Feel Great* (Pegasus).
- **Try some anise.** Pick up a jar of these licorice-flavored seeds—they're eaten as a digestive in India—the next time you're shopping for groceries. "Chew on a few of them after a gassy meal or use them to make a tea with hot water and honey," says Bonnie Taub-Dix, R.D.

- **Push on.** Kick off those winter boots for a 30-second technique. Press the inner corners of the base of your big toenails on both feet with your fingers. Touching those pressure points can reduce bloating, suggests Lilian Tibshraeny-Morten, author of *Moving the Energy: Reflexology and Meridian Therapy* (JLM Publishing).
- **Munch on asparagus.** What do Victoria's Secret models do to keep their flat physiques (besides umpteen hours of exercise)? Celebrity trainer David Kirsch, a wellness expert who has worked with Heidi Klum, tells his clients to counter water retention with this natural diuretic. Be sure to cook it thoroughly, though, to break down the fiber.

- **Sip some water.** Yes, you may feel fuller after drinking a glass, but it'll quickly move through your body, taking bloat-inducing foods and gas right along with it.
- **Spoon out the yogurt.** "The live active cultures in yogurt decrease the time food takes to move through your system and are important in providing a healthy gastrointestinal tract," explains Taub-Dix.
- **Pick a banana.** This fruit is loaded with potassium, which Moon says flushes sodium out of the body. Other potassium-rich foods include milk, kiwi fruit, dried apricots, tomato sauce and Moon's personal favorite, pure coconut water with no added sugar. ●