

Exercise Induced GI Distress

Gastrointestinal distress caused by exercise is very common among endurance athletes, specifically. Symptoms include but are not limited to bloating, gas, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, as a direct result of exercise. This phenomenon can occur due to physiological, mechanical, and nutritional reasons.



CAUSES

Physiological Reduced blood flow to the GI-tract due to increased blood flow to the muscles required for exercise, causing delayed gastric emptying

Mechanical Jumping, jolting, or running; certain positioning in workouts that contorts the GI tract preventing proper digestion

Nutritional Excess fluids or inadequate fluids prior to exercise; eating foods high in fat, protein, or fiber to exercise; or eating spicy, acidic, or dairy foods prior to exercise

PRACTICAL TIPS

If you experience GI upset and/or bloating during and after intense workouts, here are some tips to consider:

- Avoid dehydration and hydrate throughout the day prior to exercise
- Avoid overhydration and try not to “chug” fluids prior to or during exercise
- Allow yourself more time to digest, at least 60 minutes to digest a pre-workout snack, and at least 3 hours for a full meal
- Limit high fat / high protein foods prior to exercise as they sit heavy on the stomach and slow digestion
- Limit high fiber foods prior to exercise, as they take longer to digest and may cause gas, cramping, and bloating
- Avoid very spicy or acidic foods prior to exercise
- Avoid milk products prior to exercise if intolerant to dairy
- Develop a fueling schedule and practice eating prior to exercise to “train” the gut

The GI tract is highly adaptable and typically responds well to consistency. If you want to implement pre-training nutrition, start with small changes to allow your gut to adapt over time. Talk to your registered dietitian about how to stay consistent with your fueling schedule and find what foods work best for you.

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