

## Digestive symptoms, diet and demographics in UK adults

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Dietary fibre intake levels in UK adults are not currently meeting the recommended 30 g per day guidance<sup>(1)</sup>. Individuals are encouraged to increase their fibre intake, however, this may result in an increase in digestive symptoms in some people<sup>(2)</sup>. We aimed to explore current experiences of digestive symptoms in the UK adult population and determine associations with lifestyle, diet and demographic factors.

An online self-administered survey was developed using an online tool (Online Surveys), and participants were recruited via social media sites including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Reddit, forums and via word of mouth. Statistical analysis of binary or categorical data (chi squared tests) was carried out using SPSS.

The survey was completed by 238 individuals aged 18-82 years (median = 34.5); 77% female, 22% male and 1% other. At least 1 digestive symptom was reported by 81% of respondents in the previous 4 weeks. For 91% of respondents this was their normal experience of digestive symptoms. The most commonly reported symptoms were flatulence (67%), abdominal bloating (58%) and borborygmi (54%). The number of different symptoms experienced by females (median = 5) in the previous 4 weeks was significantly greater than males (median = 1) ( $p < 0.001$ ). Significantly more females (32%) rated symptoms as severe compared to males (13%) ( $p < 0.05$ ). Those who ate  $\geq 5$  portions of fruit and vegetables per day rated symptom bother as lower (median = 3 (out of 10)) than those who reported eating  $< 5$  portions (median = 5) ( $p < 0.05$ ). The lifestyle factors most commonly reported as perceived causes of digestive symptoms were work stress (38%), personal life stress (37%) and eating too fast (32%). When asked whether digestive symptoms ever negatively impact their life 47% of respondents answered yes. Energy levels (13%) and diet (12%) were most commonly identified as often being negatively impacted by digestive symptoms followed by body image (11%), daily activities, leisure activities and social life (all 8%). Significantly more females reported that digestive symptoms had a negative impact on social life ( $n = 20$ ), body image ( $n = 27$ ) and energy levels ( $n = 30$ ) than males ( $n = 1, 2$  and  $2$  respectively) ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Digestive symptoms were common among the respondents of this survey, and the results in relation to the female experience of digestive symptoms support previous research findings<sup>(3)</sup>. The results highlight the multifactorial influences that contribute to digestive symptoms and the impacts they can have on those who experience them.

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### References

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