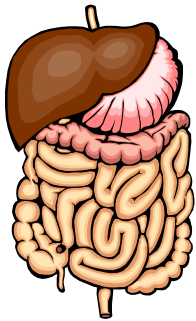


# gastrointestinal changes

There are a number of medical effects of eating disorders, many which are serious and life-threatening. Gastrointestinal changes are one of the most common problems experienced by people with Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, and other eating disorders.

## What are Gastrointestinal Changes?

Gastrointestinal problems experienced by people with an eating disorder include:



- Bloating.
  - Constipation
  - Distressed Stomach
  - Diarrhoea
  - Flatulence
  - Abdominal pain
- Fullness. If you regularly restrict your food intake, your stomach may feel uncomfortably full when you do eat.
  - Gastric emptying abnormalities, whereby gastric emptying of solids is slower.

## Why Do People With Eating Disorders Suffer From Gastrointestinal Changes?

Gastrointestinal problems are the result of disordered eating habits. Many gastrointestinal problems are caused by a diet low in the nutrients needed for a healthy intestinal tract, including fibre and water. Anorexia Nervosa patients severely restrict all food intake, and thus do not consume nearly enough fibre. Bulimia Nervosa patients can also be lacking in nutrients and fibre due to purging and periods of food restriction.

## Laxative Misuse

Gastrointestinal problems, including constipation, are also caused by the misuse of laxatives. Laxatives disrupt normal bowel function and can cause symptoms such as: loss of intestinal muscle tone, bloating, gas, colicky pain, appearance of mucus and blood in the stool, incontinence of faeces. In most people, these symptoms are reversible after stopping laxatives, but some permanent effects may occur.



**It is important that you do not self-medicate laxatives for the relief of constipation.** If necessary, your doctor may recommend and prescribe stool softeners.

## Treating Gastrointestinal Problems

Gastrointestinal problems amongst patients with Anorexia Nervosa improve when food intake is increased. Similarly, gastrointestinal problems are improved in Bulimia Nervosa patients when purging and food restriction cease. *It may take some time for the system to recover normal functioning.*



If you are concerned about gastrointestinal problems it is important you seek professional medical advice.

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