

Help — My stomach rumbles and grumbles to no end ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I have a rather embarrassing situation in that my stomach is constantly making noises that are unbecoming. This proves to be more than embarrassing during meetings and interviews and I'm constantly trying to hide or 'cover up' these noises with coughs and other distractions. This seems to be most common in the mornings, whether or not I have eaten anything. Sometimes it even sounds like flatulence. Is there anything I can do or take to help minimize this terribly embarrassing condition?

Answer

Dear Reader,

The rumbling, grumbling, or tinkling sounds that you're noticing are likely made by the bubbling and gurgling of air pockets and fluid moving through your intestine. These noises, common among many people, typically occur when you're hungry because the body is readying itself to receive food by moving air and fluids in the stomach and intestine out of the way (down towards the rectum). These sounds might also occur during the process of digestion, as the contents of the meal are processed and moved through the stomach, small intestine, and large intestine. The fancy, 50-cent name for this phenomenon is "borborygmi," a great word that sounds similar to the intestinal noise itself. Your intestine seems to be particularly active in the morning, kicking off a cacophony of borborygmi.

With this knowledge, you may want to experiment with some changes in your eating patterns to see if it might encourage your digestive system to quiet down. If you keep a journal of your foods, recording what and when you eat and drink, and how enthusiastic your borborygmi sound, you may be able to see a connection. For example, some options to consider include:

- You may cut back on caffeine, alcohol, sugar, and dairy products — all common culprits of digestive ills.
- If you're a smoker, you could try going without a cigarette to see if that has any effect on your stomach.
- Eat many smaller meals in a day, rather than either going hungry or eating two or three larger meals. You could also try eating more slowly (such as practicing mindful eating) so

the bacteria have less work to do in breaking down food.

- Drink more water! If you're dehydrated, your body has to do more work. Staying hydrated may help.
- Try chewing gum. You're usually swallowing more frequently and with lots of air as you're chewing.
- Move around after your meals. Even if you're sitting most of the day, taking a walk or a break might help get your digestive system to start moving along.

To see if there are any changes, try only one change in your eating or drinking patterns. Then, repeat it for a couple of days, and then jot down whether your borborygmi stay the same, increase in volume, or calm down in response to that change. After this, perhaps, go on to try another change. You may want to consider speaking with a registered dietitian about adapting some aspects of your diet to help. If these small differences in your eating patterns don't seem to help, consider seeking the opinion of a medical provider to work towards alleviating your concerns.

With luck and patience, you may hit upon the right mix of factors to calm the borborygmi beast within.

Alice!

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