



Take These Dishes From Ow to Oooh

Stomach-Friendly Comfort Food

If you have digestive health problems, some comfort foods can be anything but soothing. Here's how to tweak them for your tummy.

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Cozy recipes might comfort the soul, but some don't soothe the stomachs of those with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or other **digestive problems**. In fact, they can do just the opposite. Kate Scarlata, RD, a dietitian in Boston and author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Eating Well With IBS*, says that many traditional winter dishes contain fat, plus certain sugars and fibers that ferment in the intestines, causing stomach pain, bloating, gas, and diarrhea. In contrast, "light summer salads are often low in these fermentable fibers, so they can be easier on the belly," she says. Making small changes to some of your favorite comfort foods can put back the comfort factor into your meals.

Wheat-Free Chicken Pot Pie

A warm chicken pot pie might feel just right on a chilly day, but it can also do a number on your stomach. This seasonal food favorite is often loaded with fat, a common IBS trigger. The wheat in the crust is a source of the fermentable fiber fructans, says Scarlata. The crust also contains gluten, which can cause problems for those with **gluten sensitivity**. Try making one instead with a wheat-free crust and a homemade chicken stock minus the onions, which are a source of fermentable fiber. Use cornstarch rather than wheat flour to thicken the filling and give it that comfort-food feel.

Light Macaroni and Cheese

The fat and wheat in mac 'n' cheese can make this creamy comfort food a source of intestinal distress for many with **digestive health concerns**. Scarlata suggests a stomach-friendly and healthy recipe for macaroni and cheese: Instead of wheat-based pasta, use one made with rice, corn, or quinoa, as they should be easier on your digestion. "The cheese sauce can be a rich source of fat and lactose — milk sugar — so create a better-tolerated sauce using lactose-free milk and reduced-fat cheddar cheese, which is lactose-free," says Scarlata.

Gluten-Free Oatmeal

A steaming bowl of oatmeal in the morning (or any time of day) is a great option for people with digestive troubles, says Scarlata. But if you're sensitive to gluten, make sure your oats are **gluten-free** to keep it from upsetting your system. "Oats by nature don't contain gluten," she says, "but when growing in the fields or when processed, oats are often contaminated with wheat or other gluten-containing grains.". Her favorite: Bob's Red Mill gluten-free oats.

Lean Beef Stew

Beef stew can be made belly-friendly in a number of ways. First, choose beef that is extra-lean and trimmed of fat. Next, reach for a beef broth made without onions or garlic to avoid possibly triggering **gas** and diarrhea. You can make your own stock with this healthy recipe: Sear the beef, and then mix in chives, salt, pepper, water, and fresh herbs like thyme. As with chicken pot pie, use cornstarch instead of flour to thicken the broth.

Low-Fat Meat Loaf

A hearty meat loaf is a diner staple and standard comfort food favorite, but depending on how it's made, meatloaf can be either easy on the belly or not so much, says Scarlata. She suggests making it with ground chicken or turkey and some extra-lean ground beef to **minimize the fat**. Limit the amount of bread crumbs (or substitute gluten-free bread crumbs), add egg whites to keep the fat content reasonable, and season with chives or the green part of a scallion to add onion flavor without the onion.

Chili Flavor, Without the Beans

A big pot of chili is a tailgating favorite any time of year, but especially on cooler nights. Unfortunately, it can be a source of gas and **bloating** whether or not you have a digestive health problem. "For those with irritable bowel syndrome, limiting bean-rich meals may be a good idea," says Scarlata. Since chili is bean-based, there's really no good healthy recipe alternative, she says. If you're craving the flavor of chili, try another comfort food, like tacos with ground chicken.

Hearty Soup with Homemade Stock

Creamy soups may taste great, but milk-based meals are a source of **lactose**, which can cause bloating, gas, and diarrhea if you're lactose-intolerant. "Most soups are made with onion, so that would be a concern for some too," says Scarlata, who recommends making your own soups at home, so you know what's in them." Use chicken bones simmered with carrots, celery leaves, and sea salt to make a broth you can use in healthy recipes.

Apple Pie Alternatives

It's hard to resist a warm slice of apple pie, but the apples, fat, and wheat that make up this comforting dessert can cause discomfort for those with digestive issues. Apples are a significant source of fermentable sugars and **fibers**, says Scarlata. Instead, she suggests making a strawberry and blueberry crisp with a thin layer of crumble made of oats, butter, a small amount of gluten-free flour, and cinnamon.