

ASSESSMENT

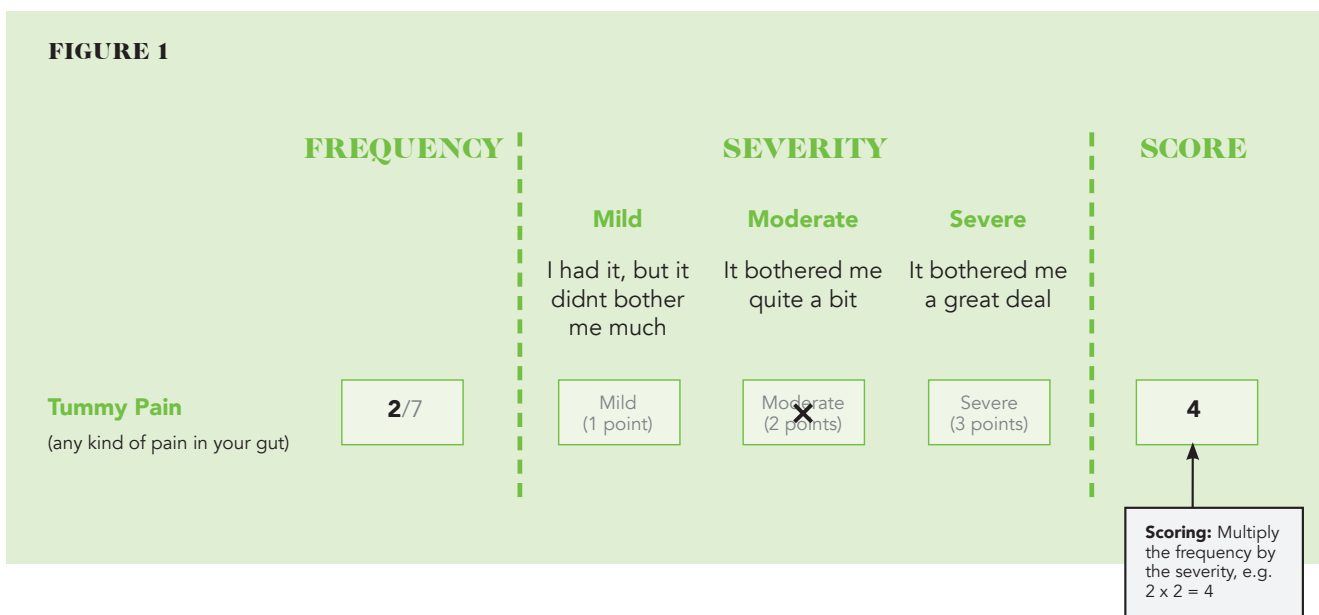
LISTENING TO YOUR GUT FEELINGS

(Page 21, *Eat Yourself Healthy*, Dr Megan Rossi)

Start by asking your gut whether any of the symptoms listed over the page have caused it any hassle over the past seven days. If the answer is no, then happy days, you can move on to the 'Checking in with Your Poop' assessment. If it's yes, have a think about: (1) how many times (frequency); and (2) their intensity (severity). Remember, there is no right or wrong answer; it's completely your own perception.

The questionnaire over the page has been adapted from a validated tool I use in clinical trials, which means it's a pretty credible way to assess gut symptoms.

An example of how to complete the questionnaire: if you get abdominal pain twice a week and it's of moderate intensity, complete the form like this:

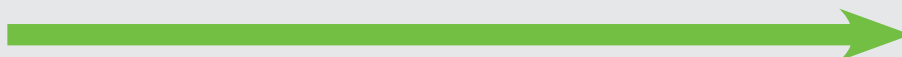


Score interpretation:

Symptom free

Very severe symptoms

Score 0



Score 42

QUESTIONNAIRE

	FREQUENCY	SEVERITY			SCORE
		Mild	Moderate	Severe	
		I had it, but it didn't bother me much	It bothered me quite a bit	It bothered me a great deal	Frequency x severity
Tummy Pain¹ (any kind of pain in your gut)	/7	Mild (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Severe (3 points)	
Heartburn² (burning/discomfort behind your breastbone)	/7	Mild (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Severe (3 points)	
Acid reflux/acid regurgitation (taste of sour fluid in your mouth)	/7	Mild (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Severe (3 points)	
Nausea (feeling sick with or without vomiting)	/7	Mild (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Severe (3 points)	
Belly gurgling/rumbling³ (vibrations or noise in your gut)	/7	Mild (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Severe (3 points)	
Belly bloating⁴ (feeling of swelling of your gut)	/7	Mild (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Severe (3 points)	
Belly distension (physical protrusion of your gut)	/7	Mild (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Severe (3 points)	
Belching/burping (bringing up gas through your mouth)	/7	Mild (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Severe (3 points)	
Excess flatulence⁵ (release of gas from your back end)	/7	Mild (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Severe (3 points)	
Constipation (infrequent or lumpy or dry poops)	/7	Mild (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Severe (3 points)	
Diarrhoea (very frequent or mushy or watery poops)	/7	Mild (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Severe (3 points)	
Urgency (urgent need to poop)	/7	Mild (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Severe (3 points)	
Incomplete evacuation (feeling of inability to pass all poop)	/7	Mild (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Severe (3 points)	
Tiredness⁶	/7	Mild (1 point)	Moderate (2 points)	Severe (3 points)	
TOTAL SCORE⁷					

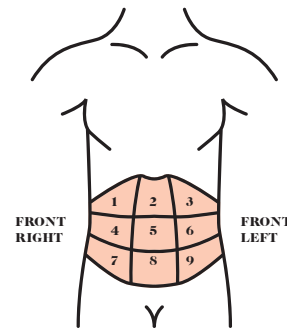
Adapted from Gastrointestinal Symptom Rating Scale, Svedlund et al. 1988

See key for points 1-7 over the page.

1. Tummy Pain

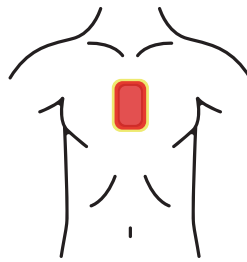
Whereabouts is your pain?

For example, if you are getting sharp pain isolated in zone 7, it might be worth going to your GP so they can take a look at your appendix. For IBS, pain is often diffused across zones 4 to 9 but it can be present anywhere across your gut.



2. Heartburn

Burning in the red section.



3. Belly gurgling/rumbling

Remember this happens to everyone, it's only problematic if it bothers you.

4. Belly bloating

This is not referring to the bloating you may get after a large meal – that is normal.

5. Excess flatulence

Did you know that it is normal to pass wind between ten and twenty times a day?

6. Tiredness

In case you were wondering, being tired because you've pulled an all-nighter catching up on your favourite TV show doesn't count. It's if you feel tired despite regularly getting 7 to 9 hours sleep.

7. Scoring

Tally together the individual scores of all your symptoms. Example: if you have abdominal pain (score 6), bloating (score 4) and diarrhoea (score 7) your total score would be: $6 + 4 + 7 = 17$.

Alarm feature:

It's always best to be on the safe side, so if your gut symptoms are accompanied by any of the symptoms described on page 81, visit your GP.

How did your conversation with your gut go? Did you learn anything new about each other? Sometimes, we don't realize how much of an impact our gut can have until we take a moment to just sit and listen to it. As a quick side note, it is worth remembering that some people tend to be a little over-conscious of their gut, which can lead to an unhealthy relationship. Yep, it is possible to be too 'into' your gut. It really is a fine balance. As with any relationship, you don't want to be neglectful, but then again, you don't want to be overly obsessive either. If you scored on three or more symptoms, it might be worth completing the gut-brain assessment in Chapter 4 (see page 81).

You may be wondering how your score compares to others. What is considered 'normal' is really quite arbitrary, although research does suggest that as many as 30 per cent of us will be bothered by gut symptoms at some stage, so you are not alone! Irrespective of how far along this scoring scale you find yourself, I'm a firm believer that absolutely no one should have to live with burdensome gut symptoms (moderate and above). The good news is that there are many simple yet effective strategies that have been shown to help combat each of these symptoms. Of course, having realistic expectations at the outset is important. Improvements can take over a month to properly manifest themselves, and sometimes we need to accept that these first-line strategies alone aren't enough – at least, initially – but we'll discuss that in Chapter 4.

If you experience tummy pain at least one day a week, you may like to jump to Chapter 6 to see if you meet the criteria for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). If not, let's continue on to the 'Checking in with Your Poop' assessment.