

Ask Leyla: Should I drink liquids with a meal?



Q: Is drinking liquids with meals bad for digestion? I routinely have a pint of water with my main meal and continue drinking water throughout the day.

A: Over much of my career in nutrition, I've seen recommendations for fluid consumption between meals rather than with meals. Here's the reasoning for that:

Digestion begins in the mouth. Chewing releases saliva which lubricates food and introduces salivary amylase for starch digestion. It also contains lysozymes to help prevent bacterial overgrowth. In fact, those with dry mouth—a common side effect of certain medications—are more prone to dental caries. For this reason, it is said that drinking fluids with meals dilutes saliva and its important components for digestion and oral health. People with digestive issues may benefit from this advice. Many individuals have reported to me improved digestion with less bloating when avoiding fluids during meals.

Those who are underweight are advised to avoid drinking fluids right before or with meals in an effort to increase food intake so beverages don't displace critical food calories. Those with overweight and obesity find drinking a glass of water before a meal helps prevent overeating. I don't discourage either option if it works for them.

There is, however, excellent advice from Traditional Chinese Medicine to avoid drinking cold and iced beverages. Doing so may contribute to Qi stagnation by 'freezing' energy pathways. Guzzling an iced cold beverage can slow down or even stun digestion to some degree. I've encountered many clients who prefer room temperature beverages due to stomach discomfort from cold drinks.

To your health!

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