

Ask Leyla: Why do veggie smoothies cause stomach discomfort?

written by Leyla Muedin MS, RD, CDN | October 23, 2024



Q: For the past several months, I have been making my husband and myself vegetable smoothies consisting of broccoli or kale, carrots, beets and celery along with a small amount of V-8 juice. I give my husband a 16 ounce serving in a big glass and I consume nearly double that amount.

About two to three hours later, my husband gets either a stomach ache or diarrhea. It does seem to help if he drinks it over a couple of hours, but I can't understand why I don't have any problems and he does.

A: Looks like a reasonably healthy smoothie recipe but 16 oz. is a hefty portion—not to mention your quart-size serving! Most likely, it's that large immediate influx of fiber and sugar that's drawing too much water to the colon and causing diarrhea in your husband. Try smaller portions like 4-6 ounces.

Here are some rules for smoothies: Never drink more than you would eat. In other words, you wouldn't eat a bag of kale, carrots and beets from your individual salad bowl, would you? That's enough produce to fill a tray! You shouldn't drink as much either. Blenderize only the portion that you would otherwise eat, not more.

Another reason to watch your portions is to avoid consuming too many goitrogens and oxalates. For example, using an entire head of broccoli or kale or other Brassica vegetables in your smoothie *every day* may eventually suppress thyroid function. Alternatively, using a big bag of spinach every day in your smoothie may result in kidney stone formation from too much oxalate.

Also, there are disadvantages to making smoothies *in advance*, mostly to do with diminishing nutrition. The more we process our produce, the more we diminish its nutritional integrity. You will have more available micronutrients in the smoothie you just poured from your blender this morning than is contained in the leftover smoothie in your fridge from yesterday. Exposure to light, heat and oxidation (i.e., the browning of your sliced apple or avocado) reduces nutrient quality.

You see, more isn't necessarily better. Eating your vegetables most of the time instead of predigesting them in the juicer will ensure you don't overdo it.

To your health!