



A survey conducted by the Indian Dietetic Association (IDA) and Country Delight among 2,017 people aged 25-50 in three metro cities—Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru—found that 70% of them suffer from digestive and gut health problems because they consume ultra-processed food (UPF) high in sugar, salt, and fat

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MIND YOUR GUT

SUNIL (name changed), a 33-year-old IT professional from Kochi, was regularly suffering from bloating, gas, and irregular bowel movements. He had a desk job, and a sedentary lifestyle. He didn't sleep well, often ate from restaurants, and treated himself with antibiotics when he got sick. After doctors advised him to exercise regularly, improve his sleep pattern, eat a fibre-rich diet with probiotics like yogurt, and limit processed foods, his condition improved in six weeks without any medication.

Sunil was fortunate as he received prompt treatment for his symptoms, managing to recover without the need for any medication. In stark contrast, the situation of Sandeep (name changed), a Delhi pilot, was much more challenging. At 27 years old, he began experiencing a troubling pattern of stomach pain that reared its head time and again. Accompanied by persistent loose motions and noticeable weight loss, his condition raised alarm bells. After undergoing a comprehensive series of

blood tests and imaging scans, doctors diagnosed him with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), a chronic condition that can significantly affect one's quality of life. With a targeted treatment plan, he was prescribed a variety of medications aimed at managing his symptoms. Fortunately, he began to show signs of improvement, gradually regaining strength and stability.

But not for long. His health took a downward turn, leading to a relapse that necessitated hospitalisation. He was given corticosteroid injections, which eventually enabled him to return to work. However, his relief was short-lived as he experienced another setback just a few months later, forcing him to confront the lingering complications of his condition once

again. "This pattern of improvement and relapse continued for two years. He was put on biological agents, and



his screenings were done at six-month intervals to monitor his progress. Once on biological drugs, he developed certain infections that were difficult to manage with available treatments. Finally, it was decided that surgery would be performed to remove the diseased segment of the intestine," said Dr Sharad Malhotra, senior consultant and head of gastroenterology, hepatology and therapeutic endoscopy, Aakash Healthcare, New Delhi.

After three years, he went ahead with surgery, and the diseased part of the intestine

was removed. "Once the disease toxicity subsided, he started improving and was managed with very simple medications. Now, this gentleman is fine, taking only basic medications for the management of his IBD," he said. Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, said, "All disease begins in the gut."

The gut refers to the entire gastrointestinal tract, which starts at the mouth, includes the oesophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine/colon, and ends at the anus.

This 30-foot-long GI tract works with other parts of one's digestive system to help break food down.

"Our gut is important not only for digestion, but also for absorption and our overall health and well-being. The gut is also a vital immune organ. Keeping it healthy is important," said Dr Rajeev Jayadevan, a senior consultant, gastroenterologist and former president of Indian Medical Association, Cochin. In fact, gut health starts the moment a baby is born. From day one, the baby is fed breast milk, which provides not only nutrition but also healthy bacteria from the mother along with essential antibodies to keep the baby safe.