

## **Good Digestive Health**

Ensuring your digestive system is in good shape is vital to both your physical and mental health.

As the interface between your body and the outside world there is nothing more important to your overall health than the health of your digestive tract. Not only is it true that you are what you eat – you are also what you digest and absorb.

The billions of cells that make up the digestive tract – the barrier between your body and the outside environment - are renewed every four days and over a lifetime approx. 100 tons of food will pass along your digestive tract.

How good your body is at digesting organic matter, extracting nutrients, processing them and eliminating the waste will determine your energy levels, state of mind and your longevity.

This said, it appears more and more common that digestive problems are becoming the norm for many people. Symptoms range from flatulence, bloating and indigestion to constipation, with many people not experiencing a bowel movement daily. Digestive problems are one of the most common health problems among women in particular.

These are the signs that all is not as good as it should be in the digestive tract. It can also have knock on effects such as low energy, skin problems and food allergies/intolerances and in turn these can lead to all sorts of other symptoms such as weight gain, aches and pains and onto arthritis.

### **How healthy is your digestive system?**

Do you experience bloating after eating?

Do you get diarrhoea or constipation sometimes for no apparent reason?

Do you ever feel discomfort in your abdomen after eating?

Do you sometimes feel nauseous after eating?

Do you often experience flatulence, bloating or belching?

Do you have a bowel movement less often than once in 24 hours?

Do you think you might have Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

If these symptoms are left unchecked there is also the possibility they could lead onto other conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, ulcers and diverticulitis.

There is no cause to panic if this sounds like you. But this is the time to transform your digestion and benefit from the rewards of improved health and vitality.

## **Easy ways to improve your digestive health:**

### **1. Take your time to eat**

Chewing is the first and a very important part of the digestive process. Taking your time, chewing thoroughly and pausing between mouthfuls means your digestive system has time to prepare for the incoming meal by increasing saliva which aids digestion. Partially digested foods are a strain on bodily functions.

### **2. Try not to eat more than you need to**

Overloading the digestive system means that food is less likely to be digested properly, which can lead to fermentation, gas and indigestion.

### **3. Limit your intake of sugar and refined foods**

These types of food encourage bad bacteria to proliferate in your gut

### **4. Enjoy plenty of fibre-rich fruits, vegetables and some live natural yoghurt**

On the flip side these foods help to encourage the growth of beneficial bacteria in your gut

### **5. Try not to drink too much at mealtimes**

Anything more than a few sips of water an hour either side of a full meal can dilute your stomach acid and compromise full digestion.

### **6. Sip plenty of water through the day – away from mealtimes**

It is important that the body receives 2 litres of water a day for all system functions and for vitality. Ideally half of that amount should come from vegetables and fruit, but as many of us are rarely able to satisfy this amount, drinking bottled or filtered water and herb and fruit teas help make up this amount. Dehydration may cause loss of minerals, constipation and toxicity that can lead to bloating and headaches.

### **7. Food combining**

Simple meals are most easily digested. Taking in a range of different foods – several proteins, starches, raw and cooked fruit, vegetables, coffee, alcohol and sweets that rely on different and competing enzymes and digestive processes will impede digestion. Eat well-balanced meals with plenty of fresh vegetables and wholegrains.

### **8. Consider food intolerance**

A food intolerance can be one common cause of digestive problems. Dairy and wheat are frequent "allergens", but others can include citrus, eggs, tomatoes, coffee and gluten found in oats, rye and barley. To help you identify any problem foods keep a 2 week food diary then try to eliminate the suspected item from your diet for 2 weeks, reintroduce it and note any changes.

### **9. Stomach acid insufficiency**

Hydrochloric acid is produced by the stomach to break down proteins, fats and carbohydrates. Stress depletes this production and also depletes the vitamin B6 and zinc needed to produce it. People may also be lacking in these due to poor dietary intake lacking fish, nuts and seeds or by eating foods that deplete them such as sugar, refined carbohydrates, caffeine and fizzy drinks. Hydrochloric acid can be supplemented until enough B6 and zinc is absorbed to ensure the body then starts making its own.

### **10. Digestive enzyme deficiencies**

May cause digestive problems if carbohydrates, proteins or fats are not digested properly. These can be taken as supplements. Fresh papaya, pineapple, alfalfa, sprouts and raw foods contain beneficial digestive enzymes.