

Digestive Issues

Do you frequently have an upset stomach, stomach pain, heartburn, gas, diarrhea or constipation, bloating? Are you having trouble losing unwanted fat?

It could be that your digestive system needs some help.

DIGESTION – AN OVERVIEW

Have you ever wondered what happens to the food and drink you put in your body?

Your body extracts the nutrients it needs – the proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, and water – from what you eat and drink through the process of digestion.

Digestion starts in the brain. The sight, the smell, the thought of food triggers the body's digestive process. When you eat, it's important to chew the food thoroughly (just like your mother told you to) to mechanically break the food down and to expose the food to digestive enzymes in the mouth. When you swallow the food, a gentle type of churning occurs in the stomach (unlike the thrashing motion that occurs when you chew) where the food is exposed to stomach acid. From there, it travels into the intestines where it is exposed to digestive enzymes from the pancreas and bile from the gallbladder and the liver.

The large intestine is home to multiple bacteria, microorganisms collectively known as gut flora, that aid in the fermenting of food and that also produce certain vitamins.

The waste is then eliminated through defecation.

That sounds pretty simple and well organized. How can it go so wrong for some people?

Sometimes it's a matter of what you're ingesting.

Sometimes it's a matter of how you ingest food. Sometimes it's a matter of how you are digesting the food.

WHAT YOU EAT

There's probably no such thing as one diet that is perfect for everyone. Nutritional requirement is very individual; it varies from person to person. Some people, for instance, need more protein than others, some need more carbohydrates than others.

One guideline that does apply to all for healthy eating is to avoid refined sugars as much as possible. Apart from spiking blood sugar levels, it can also increase cholesterol levels, stimulate fat storage, and promote the overgrowth of a type of fungus called candida yeast. It can also create hormone problems. Sugar is the "master" hormone in the body; if it spikes so do many other "bad" hormones that lead to ill health.

Another guideline is to eat whole foods as much as you can. Avoid processed food to the degree possible. Processed foods are those that have been altered, often not in a good way. Many of them contain elevated levels of sugar, salt and bad fat to try to make them more appealing to the taste buds and/or to extend their shelf life. Fewer packaged food products means fewer processed foods. Preparing and cooking food yourself is much better for your digestion. This could mean eating out less and eating at home more, and while it may be less convenient to cook meals at home, it is certainly better for your health (and often tastes better).

There is also the matter of food sensitivities. Eating foods to which you are sensitive can trigger digestive impairment or even be the cause of it. Food sensitivities could be at the root of gut inflammation that prevents absorption of nutrients.

HOW YOU EAT IT

There are two parts to the nervous system, the sympathetic part (the “fight or flight”) and the parasympathetic part (the “rest and digest”). When someone is under chronic stress or under stress while they’re eating, the sympathetic part of the nervous system is in high gear and the body becomes more concerned with getting blood to the heart and lungs than with digestion. When that occurs, the body doesn’t make enough stomach acid or digestive enzymes.

Habitually wolfing down a sandwich while you’re driving or constantly on the go impairs the digestive process. When you’re under long-term stress, circulation is concentrated to the arms and legs (so you can run in the “fight or flight” mode) and circulation to the bowel is decreased. Reduced circulation to the bowel makes it very difficult to digest and absorb nutrients.

Undigested food in the stool, intestinal pain, stomach pain, bloating are all symptomatic of poor digestion, which could be caused by different factors such as insufficient stomach acids or enzymes, gall bladder issues, yeast overgrowth, bacteria, all of which can be simply from too much chronic stress and not allowing yourself to digest properly.

Taking the time to just chill out and eat is good advice. Simply calming down, meditating, deep breathing for five minutes or so before eating can significantly improve digestion and nutrient absorption. As well as stopping to smell the roses, stop and smell the food and get that digestive process started. This allows the parasympathetic part of your nervous system to do its job, to relax you enough to trigger the digestive system to produce the essential acids and enzymes.

DIGESTION TAKES TIME

Digestion is not an instant process. Once you’ve

eaten something, it takes 30 minutes to two hours for the nutrients to be absorbed into the blood and into the cells, sending a signal to your brain that you’ve eaten. It can take a long time before you realize that you have eaten enough and this can cause you to keep eating and overeating. If you wait too long to eat, you develop low blood sugar which can lead to cravings, moodiness, irritability, and “binge eating”. Having a healthy snack in those long intervals between meals will help to keep you from binge eating.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD DIGESTION

Digestion is the mechanism by which the body gets nutrients. If your digestive system is impaired, your body is simply not getting the nutrients it needs. This can lead to a multitude of health issues apart from the obvious ones like heartburn, stomach pain, bloating, constipation, and diarrhea. Depriving the body of nutrients can also induce other conditions including depression, anxiety and skin problems. The biggest problem we normally see is low energy. So many people have low energy simply because they are not digesting properly so they are not getting energy from their food.

DIGESTION AND WEIGHT LOSS

An improperly functioning digestive system makes it very difficult to shed unwanted fat. Your body does require a certain amount of “good fat”, the type available in such foods as avocados, whole eggs, and nuts. If you are not properly digesting the fat content of the food you’re eating, your body thinks it’s not getting enough fat and it will hold on to what it’s got. It thinks it’s in starvation mode and it will hoard fat. Poor digestion also leads to dysbiosis (a microbial imbalance), inflammation in the bowel and general inflammation in the body. Inflammation leads to fat storage. Poor digestion also deprives the body of the nutrients it needs for the metabolism to burn fat.



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