

HEALTH BEGINS IN YOUR BELLY:



YOUR TOXIC GUT
AND HOW TO **FIX IT**

Health Begins in Your Belly: Your Toxic Gut and How to Fix It

By: The Alternative Daily

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You have probably been told that something is "all in your head", but what about being told that something is "all in your gut?" Gut distress is incredibly common in America. In fact, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) reports that over one quarter of all Americans suffer from digestive disorders. Each year, over 62 million Americans are diagnosed with a digestion-related condition - which is the number one reason people miss work and visit the doctor. If you are reading this book, it is likely that you or someone you love is one of them.

FACT: There is an overriding consensus that all sickness and all health begins in the gut.

The gut has been called the "second brain" or "other brain," due to its powerful influence over health. The digestive system contains nearly 500 million neurons, along a 30-foot track with an area the size of a tennis court that starts at your esophagus and ends at your anus. This intricate and highly intelligent human plumbing system is often neglected and eventually, like all plumbing, ends up clogged or in some other state of disrepair.

Food fuels the body, and the digestive system is like the engine that burns the fuel and distributes energy throughout the body, while eliminating waste. This very finely tuned system works wonderfully when the fuel is of superior quality. However, if the fuel is

second-rate or does not get properly broken down by the stomach, pancreas, liver, gallbladder, small and large intestines, we become weak and ill.

Problems with the gut manifest themselves in a multitude of seemingly unrelated ways. However, once you have a better understanding of how the gut actually functions, it will be easier to grasp why so many bodily processes are utterly dependent on its health for their health. Like a major corporation, a poorly-managed gut cannot fly under the radar for long. Sooner or later, the body rebels for lack of sound gut leadership and chaos ensues. Cellular communication goes amuck, evil bacteria infiltrates broken defense barriers and sickness and disease prevail.

DID YOU KNOW?

The impacts of poor digestive health are far-reaching. While you may make a correlation between constipation, gas, nausea, stomach pain or heartburn to issues in your gut, the disruption doesn't stop there. People with heart disease, high blood pressure, arthritis, osteoporosis, asthma, headaches, gum and tooth problems, depression, chronic fatigue, bad breath, psoriasis, obesity, eczema and heartburn may all be suffering from a malfunctioning digestive system. There is good news in all of this: once order is re-established, health is restored.

Bad News/Good News

The gut is the core of the body and when it is out of balance, the whole body is out of balance. When the gut is not working properly, nothing else in the body works properly either. Digestive distress can interfere with everyday living and cause a tremendous amount of discomfort; this is the bad news. The good news is that your gut is not your enemy. Once balance is restored, the whole body responds and wellness ensues. In order to restore balance, it is paramount to understand what your gut is trying to tell you. A distressed digestive system sends out a variety of signals. When your body is trying to tell you something, it is best to listen. Pills and other remedies only mask the real problem of imbalance that will immediately return once the pills or remedies are withdrawn. Don't let your gut hold you in bondage, and don't ignore the signals that it is sending you.

Your Intestines are Alive

Much about the way you treat your intestines may change once you realize that they are living organs in the same way that your heart is a living organ. They are not a series of connected, inert tubes, but rather part of a living system that absorbs, sends signals, secretes and metabolizes. We can choose to eat whatever we want, be it meat,

vegetables or even a dozen Twinkies. However, our intestines are going to react differently to everything that we put into our mouths. If we pay close enough attention, we can tell whether or not our intestines are happy with what we have eaten. The problem is, we just don't listen closely enough.

Part One: Gut Biology You Should Know

Digestion Primer

In order to fully grasp how vital digestive health is to overall health and well-being, a short lesson in digestion is necessary. Food is a necessary part of living. The human body requires food to fuel all living functions. Food is needed for all the chemical reactions that occur in every cell of your body. It is vital to life. Since most food is too large to pass through the cell membranes, it has to be broken down through the process of digestion.

Digestion is both a mechanical and chemical process that begins before we put food into



our mouths. Once the senses catch a whiff of incoming food, digestive enzymes begin to flow. The lining of the digestive tract prepares for the food's arrival.

Eating and Chewing

Chewing breaks food down into smaller parts so that the body can digest it more efficiently. Bigger pieces of food take more effort and a longer time period to break down. Consuming healthy, whole foods that are rich in water content makes this process much easier. Your teeth, tongue, and mouth work together as a team to create a mixture, known as a bolus, which makes its way down the digestive tract. Make sure to chew slowly and mindfully.

Peristalsis

Peristalsis is an automatic, reflexive movement that propels food particles along the digestive tract. The motion of peristalsis is like a thousand tiny people doing the wave along your digestive tract, pushing the food along.

Mechanical and Chemical Breakdown

Once food particles enter into the stomach, they are mixed with stomach acids like a washing machine mixing clothes. The stomach secretes hydrochloric acid, and then mixes the food particles over and over. There are two valves in the stomach: one on the top at the

esophagus and one at the far end at the opening of the small intestine. Both valves remain closed while the mixture of food and digestive juices are mixed together.

The bolus of food formed in the mouth is now called chyme, a semifluid mass of partially digested food, acid, and enzymes. Once the mixture has broken the particles into smaller sizes, the lower valve opens and the bolus of food enters into it. At this point, most of the macro digestive process has taken place. The small intestine is where most of the food particles are absorbed.

Absorption

This is the passage of the digested food from the digestive tract into the circulatory and lymphatic systems for distribution into the cells. This happens in the small intestine. The small intestine is extremely long, with a surface area that is perfect for absorption of tiny particles into the bloodstream for distribution to cells.

Defecation

The elimination of indigestible substances happens at the end of the digestive process. What is not digested or absorbed must be eliminated. Foods that contain a great deal of bacteria are also eliminated. Massive peristaltic movements push fecal material into the rectum. When the feces enter, the rectal walls swell, stimulating pressure-sensitive receptors to initiate a reflex for defecation. Defecation is the emptying of the rectum.

The muscles along the rectum contract and increase the pressure inside the tract. When pressure forces the sphincters, or valves, to open, the feces are expelled from the anus, the last part of the gastrointestinal tract. The voluntary contraction of the diaphragm and abdominal muscles aids defecation by increasing pressure inside the abdomen. This pushes the walls of the colon and rectum inward. If defecation does not occur, the feces will stay in the rectum until the next wave of mass peristalsis, which will again stimulate the pressure-sensitive receptors, creating the urge to defecate. There is a conscious control at this stage that can influence the urge, or restrict the urge, to defecate.

FACTS ABOUT POOP

Feces are prepared for elimination in the large intestine by the action of bacteria. These bacteria ferment any remaining carbohydrates and release hydrogen, carbon dioxide, and methane gas. They also convert remaining proteins into amino acids, and break down the amino acids into simpler substances. Some of these are carried off in the feces, contributing to the feces' odor. The rest are absorbed. Bacteria also decompose bilirubin, the breakdown product of red blood cells that is excreted in bile, into simpler



pigments, which give feces their brown color.

Intestinal bacteria also aid in the synthesis of several vitamins needed for metabolism, including B vitamins and vitamin K. The shape, density, color and odor of feces are a good indicator of digestive health.

Go On - Take a Peek

While you may not be in the habit of checking what comes out of your bottom, it is a good idea to sneak a peek from time to time. Obviously, if you have a difficult time using the bathroom or experience serious bouts of diarrhea, something is amiss within your gut. The colors, smell and shape of your stools could be giving you a warning about your health, so it pays to be informed.

Color

Stool color is often a reflection of what we eat. There is a wide variance in brown shades that are all considered normal. The normal production of bile keeps stool within the brown range. Black or yellow stool may indicate a problem. Black stool may be a sign of intestinal or stomach bleeding, while bright red stool may mean that there is blood coming from the anus, rectum or large intestine. Some foods and iron supplements can cause a stool to appear black, as well. Yellow or

pale white stool may indicate a problem with bile flow, and can be an indicator of such serious conditions as cancer of the bile ducts, pancreatic cancer or hepatitis.

Smell

The smell of poop is not something that is enjoyable, however, when the odor changes or becomes excessively foul, it could be a warning. Because stool is comprised of undigested food parts, dead cells, bacteria and mucus, we cannot expect it to smell great. Foul-smelling poop may result from taking certain medications or from food that has been stuck in the colon for a long time. If the odor of your stool changes dramatically, it is a good idea to consult a health practitioner.

Shape

Pencil-thin stools could be the result of an obstruction in the lower parts of the colon. If the stool is very soft it may indicate that there is too much oil. If the body is not absorbing the oil it may float on the water. A healthy stool is “S” shaped and well-formed, but not too hard. The stool should ideally enter the water without a heavy splash and sink. If it floats, it means you are not digesting fats well.

Diarrhea

Diarrhea that lasts a while could be an indication of a more serious problem. While it is normal for the body to get rid of toxins when we are sick, diarrhea that lasts for a month

or more may be a sign of other chronic conditions.

Bathroom Posture

Proctologist Michael Frellich once said, “we are not meant to sit on toilets, we are meant to squat in the field.” This doctor is not the first to suggest that modern-day toilets do not promote healthy elimination. The ideal position for defecation is with the thighs high up on the abdomen. There are a number of ways to achieve this position, from buying special adaptive devices for your toilet to a simple stool placed in front of the toilet. Although it may sound silly, there is empirical evidence that this posture is actually helpful. It is especially beneficial in the prevention of hemorrhoids. There is less straining involved when you squat; this helps take pressure off of the abdomen.

Constipation

In the United States, constipation is one of the most common gastrointestinal complaints. More than four million Americans have frequent constipation. The problem is much greater than this. Those reporting constipation most often are women and adults aged 65 and older. However, many never seek help from their health care providers, choosing instead to manage the constipation with over-the-counter laxatives, which is sad. What’s worse is that most doctors don’t understand normal gut physiology and don’t make appropriate recommendations when it comes to gut health.

Constipation occurs when the colon absorbs too little water, or when the colon's muscle contractions are slow or sluggish, causing the stool to move through the colon too slowly. As a result, stools can become hard and dry.

Common Causes of Constipation

Stress and hormonal imbalances are two common causes of constipation, as well as:

- Inadequate fiber in the diet
- Lack of physical activity (especially in the elderly)
- Medications
- Dairy products
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)
- Changes in life or routine, such as pregnancy, aging, and travel
- Abuse of laxatives
- Ignoring the urge to have a bowel movement
- Dehydration
- Hemorrhoids, anal, and colon problems

Better hydration, stress management, exercise and dietary considerations are often necessary to resolve the issue of constipation. Probiotics can be very helpful in providing the bacterial cultures to aid in digestion. Acidophilus is a common probiotic and does well in acid, but is not the only type of probiotic. Magnesium citrate can also

be a very effective solution to constipation, which is a non-prescription supplement you can purchase from a local pharmacy.

A Gut Out of Order

When your gut gets out of order, a number of things can happen. Intestinal problems originate from an imbalance in gut permeability, from malabsorption of nutrients to overactive absorption of foreign invaders. When the gut becomes defenseless, the health of the whole body is at risk.

Did You Know?

While some bad breath is due to mouth and gum issues, severe halitosis actually comes from the digestive system. Like a leak in a sewer pipe, odors from the gut seep out of the mouth. While your breath is never going to smell minty-fresh all of the time, severe bad breath should not be ignored. Most of the time, severe odor is your stomach's way of saying that a diet change is in order.

The following are the most commonly diagnosed digestive disorders in America:

Heartburn

When the contents of the stomach migrate up into the esophagus and cause irritation, heartburn occurs. This usually takes place between 30 to 60 minutes after you have

eaten. Also known as GERD (GastroEsophageal Reflux Disease), the burning inside is made worse if you recline immediately after eating. GERD is usually caused by:

- A relaxed lower esophageal sphincter
- Certain foods (chocolate, spicy foods, caffeine, coffee, alcohol, nitrates)
- Medications (calcium channel blockers, beta-blockers)
- Obesity (increases intra-abdominal pressure, pushing food upwards)

Stomach Ulcers

The stomach has a protective layer of mucus that protects it against acid and digestive juices. Inflammation, alcohol, infection and spicy foods can eat away at this protective layer. Eventually, you may develop a raw, open sore on the lining of your stomach, known as an ulcer. Ulcers left untreated can injure several layers of the stomach lining and eventually hit blood vessels, causing bleeding in the digestive tract.

Contrary to what you may think, personality type does not determine whether or not you get an ulcer. So, whether you are a wild Type A or a relaxed Type B has very little to do with the development of an ulcer. Ulcers, for the most part, are the result of bacteria known as *Helicobacter pylori* or *H. pylori*.

When it was discovered in 1979 and proved irrefutably in 1981 that stomach ulcers are caused by a *Helicobacter pylori* infection, and that *H. pylori* thrives in an alkaline environment, the medical establishment did its best to ignore the truth. All these years

later, the medical/pharmaceutical establishment still makes billions of dollars each year from proton pump inhibitors and H2 histamine blockers to treat the “excess stomach acid” of upper GI ulcers.

Absurd!

The problem isn't high stomach acid. The problem is (usually) LOW stomach acid. Age, a bad diet, and even stress (causing a sympathetic response in your gut thereby inhibiting gut function), DECREASE stomach acid. This more alkaline environment is great for bacteria like H. pylori and other bacteria to set up house. They would otherwise be held under control by more acid in an acidic environment.

Every time a person reaches for a pill to “block stomach acid”, it could actually be prolonging the underlying gut problem and making it worse.

Some people who think they have heartburn actually have an ulcer. Ulcer pain is generally located just above the belly button, while GERD pain is most often felt in the chest and throat. Eating neutralizes stomach acid and usually makes an ulcer feel better, while it tends to irritate GERD. If the ulcer is caused by a bacterial infection, you can pass it back and forth between you and your partner until you both are treated.

Malabsorption

Since most of the absorption performed by the gastrointestinal tract takes place in the small intestine, malabsorption can be a devastating health problem. It can happen in many ways. Malabsorption is a disruption of digestion and nutrient absorption.

There are three phases of normal digestion and absorption:

1. *At the intestinal wall* - Pancreatic and biliary secretions continue breaking down the chyme that has entered the small intestine.

2. *Inside the intestinal wall* - Sufficient surface area is important for the chyme to contact the villi. The larger the surface area, the better the absorption. When the surface area is reduced, as in the case when there has been damage to the microvilli, your intestinal wall is compromised and absorption decreases. The microvilli contain enzymes called brush border enzymes. Brush border enzymes are important for the final stages of food breakdown. These include ones you may have heard about before: *lactase* (breaks down lactose into glucose and galactose); *sucrase* (breaks down sucrose into glucose and fructose); *maltase* (breaks down maltose into glucose) and *aminopeptidases* (which break down peptides into amino acids).

3. *Absorption* - The microvilli absorb the products resulting from the breakdown of food into the capillary bloodstream.

If the lining of the intestine is damaged, it cannot absorb nearly as well. This leads to malabsorption. Several diseases can result in damage to the intestine.

Celiac Disease

In celiac disease, the gluten found in certain grains (primarily wheat, barley and rye) causes an immunological response, which damages the small intestinal lining.

The symptoms of celiac disease may include diarrhea, steatorrhea (abnormal fat excretion in the feces), weight loss, abdominal distention, weakness and muscle wasting. Skin rash may also be present, and is referred to as dermatitis herpetiformis.

Any time there is a chronic dermatitis, intestinal problems should be suspected. Celiac disease has also been associated with other autoimmune diseases such as Graves, type I diabetes, Parkinson's disease, Addison's disease, scleroderma, atrophic gastritis, and pancreatic insufficiency.

Leaky Gut Syndrome

Also known as Hyperpermeable Intestines, leaky gut occurs when the intestinal lining has been irritated so much that it develops holes that are large enough to disable the normal selective screening mechanism. It is akin to cutting extra holes in a sieve, allowing things you don't want to pass through. With larger holes, undigested particles

of food and other unwanted items such as toxins, yeast and waste seep into your bloodstream.

The cells of the intestinal tract normally form 'tight junctions' where absorption takes place. These tight junctions keep out large food particles as well as foreign microbes. When digestion is happening as it should, these junctions remain closed, allowing only what is necessary through; the weave is very tight.

When foreign particles infiltrate the screen, the body begins to fight back against the invasion. The liver does its best to keep up with the toxins, however undigested food particles and yeast may be too much for it. The immune system, disrupted, begins to fight off the invaders, however there are often too many of them, and the tissues in the body begin to absorb them and become inflamed.

The body tries to fight against the inflammation, and as a result, other areas of concern are left untended, such as filtering blood, fighting bacteria in the gut, etc. This can result in immunological disorders. Intestinal leaky gut has been found in all chronic inflammatory bowel diseases.

Symptoms of leaky gut vary widely between people and depend on the extent of the damage. Chronic diarrhea and constipation are signs that the intestinal walls are inflamed. Some people develop a rash as the body tries to dump the toxins out through

the skin. Common sickness results when the immune system is compromised. Some may experience headaches, memory loss, fatigue, sugar cravings, bloating and anxiety. All of these symptoms are an indication that the bloodstream is being invaded.

Leaky gut left unattended can put a tremendous toxic overload on the liver. In an attempt to remedy the situation, the liver produces harmful chemical byproducts that make the condition worse. Chronic degenerative diseases, including cancer, may develop over time.

Common causes of leaky gut are:

- Diet
- Chronic stress
- Medications
- Lack of zinc
- Yeast
- Parasites
- Alcohol
- Gluten

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

IBS is a chronic disorder causing abdominal pain and often dramatic changes in bowel habits. IBS is associated with an abdominal discomfort that has two of the following features:

- Pain or discomfort is relieved with defecation
- A change in frequency of the stool
- A change in appearance of the stool

The cause of IBS has been attributed to small bowel bacterial overgrowth. Significant improvement of symptoms of IBS has been attributed to using probiotics. Also, a lifestyle change is due; change in diet, stress handling and attitude.



Dysbiosis

There are more than 400 microbial species in the healthy gastrointestinal tract. Most of these are good, and help with the digestion of food. However, an overgrowth or an excessive colonization of certain microbial species can change the metabolic and/or immunologic status of the host. This change can lead to disease or dysfunction, and is known as dysbiosis.

Inflammatory Bowel Disorders

1. *Ulcerative colitis* - Chronic recurrent disease involving the colon, causing diffuse inflammation.
2. *Crohn's disease* - Chronic recurrent disease involving any segments of the gastrointestinal tract, characterized by 'patchy areas of inflammation.'

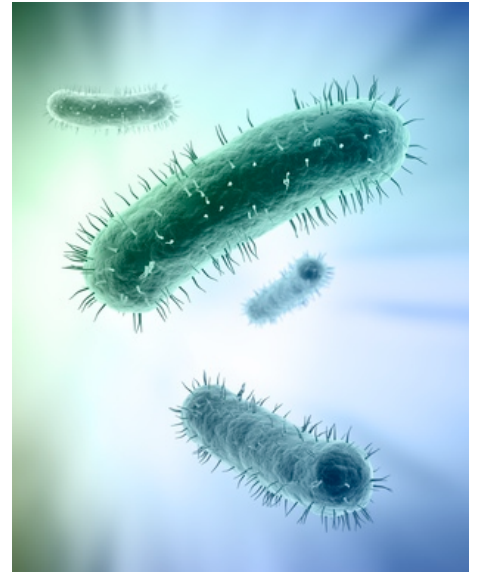
The cause of these conditions is largely related to diet, stress, and lifestyle, and has genetic tendencies. There is often an aggressive response of the immune system to luminal bacteria present in the tract. These causes - the diet, stress, or lifestyle habits, and the reaction of the body - create a heightened immune response which may continue for many years without the person aware of it, while the destruction of the intestinal tract continues. In addition, the immune system may continue its aggressive activity on other parts of the body.

What About Bacteria?

Bacteria are second only to viruses as the smallest living things existing on earth. One drop of water may contain billions of bacteria; this gives you an idea of just how small they are. Bacteria have no nucleus and only one chain of DNA. They come in a variety of shapes including rods, spheres, commas or spirals. They can multiply in favorable conditions and behave quite aggressively at times. Before the discovery of bacteria in the 17th century, people thought that disease came from the devil or some other demonic force.

Good Bacteria

Also known as beneficial bacteria, friendly bacteria or probiotics, good bacteria are part of the intestinal microflora. These good bacteria are part of the body's natural defense system. They act as a barrier in the intestines and prevent foreign invaders from attaching to the lining, and they are also integral to digestion. Good bacteria play a major role in immunity.



The benefits of probiotics are numerous. Allergies, irritable bowel syndrome, constipation, and diarrhea can all be alleviated when the right combination of probiotics are ingested. Probiotics are also critical for the formation of vitamin B12 and biotin.

The kind of probiotics that most benefit the large intestines are called bifidobacterium. These good bacteria do not like acid or oxygen. Ingesting them at a time when stomach acid levels are too high, such as at breakfast, destroys much of these bacteria. The stomach acid is highest between the hours of 7 a.m. and 11 a.m. Stomach acid is typically lower at dinner and before bed. Therefore, once the right beneficial bacteria combination is found, supplementation should be taken at least two hours after dinner.

Bad Bacteria

Also known as harmful bacteria, bad bacteria found in the gut may contain over 500 different types of microbes. The healthier you are, the fewer of these bad guys you have, and the ones you do have are rigidly managed by the good bacteria.

When the gut is healthy, the good bacteria are larger in number than the bad bacteria. However, many people have fewer than necessary of the good bacteria, which creates a state of imbalance.

There are many reasons why an imbalance can occur:

- Exposure to chemicals in water
- Highly processed diet
- Use of antibiotics
- Stress
- Lack of sunlight

An imbalance in bacteria may cause symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome, fatigue, allergies, headaches and autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis. Many people with bacterial imbalances simply need an adjustment in diet to relieve their symptoms.

The War between Good and Bad Bacteria

Healthy bacteria are designed to wage war against invaders such as bad bacteria, fungus and parasites. However, it is common for the healthy bacteria army to be reduced to numbers so low that the battle is not even fair. The bad guys crowd out the good guys. With the bad bacteria in charge, the gut environment changes drastically, and more and more bad bacteria move in and thrive.

There are many reasons why bad bacteria can dominate. Use of antibiotics, a diet high in processed foods, sugars and carbohydrates, stress and toxins all provide a supportive environment for bad bacteria. As the bad bacteria continue to dominate, the following may happen:

- Depletion of vitamin B12 and some amino acids
- Decreased amount of digestive enzymes
- The conversion of essential fatty acids into damaging fats
- Increased potential of GI infection
- Increased potential of GI inflammatory diseases
- Interference in the breakdown of bile acids and estrogens
- The creation of a fertile environment for cancer

When Good Flora Goes Bad

Overgrowth of bad flora and the presence of dysbiosis in body tissues are clear signals that something has gone wrong in the GI tract, which will lead to unhealthy changes in

the body. There are at least eight pathways that lead to dysbiosis. They include:

- Eating too much sweet and starchy foods
- Use of antibiotics
- Stress
- Poor digestion
- Inflammation
- Infection
- Exposure to toxins
- Lowered immune defenses

Disease-Causing Microbes

Opportunistic bacteria, viruses, or fungi take advantage of certain opportunities to cause disease, in fact, they seek these opportunities. These microorganisms often lie dormant in body tissues for many years, such as in the case of the human herpes viruses. They are extremely common but usually cause no symptoms of illness. When the immune system cannot raise an adequate response, these microorganisms are activated, begin to multiply, and soon overwhelm the body's weakened defenses. This happens because a person breaks the fundamental laws of health: stress, bad diet, sugar, lack of sleep, medications, lack of exercise, etc.

Opportunistic bacteria can affect digestion and absorption, nutrient production, pH and immune health; that is, they make these worse for normal gut physiology.

Stool cultures that identify bacteria and yeast can determine the presence of beneficial flora, imbalanced flora, and dysbiotic flora.

Infections from yeast can cause a variety of symptoms, both inside the gastrointestinal system and beyond it. Gastrointestinal (GI) tract infections are common and can be either clinical (symptomatic) or sub-clinical (asymptomatic). Some general complaints are: fatigue, body pain, headaches, cognitive problems, light-headedness, brain fog and/or general malaise.

The two most prevalent infections are *Helicobacter pylori*, a bacterium that primarily inhabits the stomach, esophagus and upper duodenum, and *Cryptosporidium parvum*, a parasite that primarily inhabits the small intestine and regularly cycles from inside the cell (intracellular) to outside the cell (extracellular).

Part Two: Let's Get Practical

Western medicine has, for the most part, attacked digestive disorders as it has any other disorder; with an arsenal of chemical concoctions and surgical procedures. Medications do just what their name implies – they medicate. While conventional medical practices are useful in many ways and can bring great relief, they do not prevent digestive problems from occurring, and can even sometimes exacerbate the symptoms. It is rare that you will visit your doctor with a gastrointestinal complaint and come out with an altered lifestyle plan. It is more likely that you will have a prescription for some form of medication. Western doctors are not taught about prevention, they are taught about treating a symptom. While prescription medication or surgery may ultimately be necessary, be cautious about taking a pill as your first line of defense. Your first and ultimate line of defense is always overall good health. Once this is achieved, your body is much better equipped to maintain homeostasis.

The Group of Seven

The reasons why your gut is failing you may seem vast and complex, but in reality, it is quite simple. Understanding these reasons will help you make the necessary changes in your life to restore balance to your “second brain.” This restoration will allow your body to properly defend itself and keep illness at bay. Don't worry if you cannot make these changes all at once. Aim for gradual changes over a period of time and your gut will thank you!

Reason One: Consuming Dead Food

Consuming dead food is one of the worst things you can do for your gut. Dead foods are those that contain nothing of value for the body. Dead foods encourage imbalance and degenerative diseases such as diabetes and arthritis, and they will make you fat. When you consume dead food you will be tired, achy, irritable and poorly focused. You may experience high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Remember, your gastrointestinal system will not automatically shoot something back up because it is useless. You have to make that choice.



There are some foods that are life-promoting and some foods that are death-promoting. Choosing life-promoting foods is always the best option. All foods are not created equal; some things that are sold as food should actually have a warning or hazardous substance label on them, due to the damage they will cause. America, like other industrialized nations, has become expert at stripping foods of their natural fibers (where the health-promoting benefits are found), and tarnishing them with synthetic chemicals to make something that minimally resembles the real food it came from, but is nothing more than an imposter. These manipulated foods, sold in bright and eye-catching packages with

promises of good health, contain little, if any nutrition. The toxins found in these foodstuffs are the exact things that put unnecessary burden on our digestive system, as it strives to work together with our other organs to rid the body of these unwanted substances.

Everyone has to eat; there is no doubt about that. However, we must eat to drive metabolism, and the best food to eat to accomplish this goal is real, live food. The trillions of cells, bacteria, yeasts, viruses and fungi in the body can be either healthy or unhealthy. The key is not to get rid of the microbes that are found in our mouths, sinuses, eyes, toes, nails, ears, urinary tracts, digestive tracts and elsewhere, but to provide the proper nutrients to keep all the microbes happy and well-balanced. When we eat dead food, we kill off millions of beneficial probiotics, and this is where our bodies' natural defense mechanisms start to break down.

The Standard American Diet (SAD) is not well balanced, and you do yourself no favors by following it. Choose instead to eat a diet that is heavily weighted in foods as close to their natural states as possible. This means saying goodbye to packages, cans, bags and boxes, for the most part. Real, fresh, local, seasonal and organic are words that should come to mind when you think of live foods. When we consume living foods, the enzymes in the foods co-mingle with our digestive enzymes in a beautiful way – the way they are meant to mingle. There is no battle, no inflammation and no irritation. The body recognizes the substance as food and knows exactly what to do with it.

Consuming a diet high in processed foods sends confusing signals to the digestive system, and an internal war ensues. Live food contains vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients and antioxidants that were created for our digestive systems, our bloodstreams and our organs. The preservatives, bleaching agents and additives found in dead foods put tremendous pressure on the liver. Toxins found in man-made fats such as margarine get stored in our fat layers and begin to form plaque on our arteries.

Why are we so surprised that the foods closest to nature offer the most nutrients, and that those farthest removed cause cancer, diabetes, and heart disease? It makes sense that the less we manipulate a food the higher the nutrient value will be. A good example are blueberries, which are very high in phytochemicals to help create a strong immune system. Certain phytochemicals help to increase the body's ability to detoxify; working in harmony with the gut and the immune system to keep the blood clean.

Live Food and Digestion

Living organisms (probiotics) help break down the nutrients found in live foods. Our bodies also make enzymes that continue to break the food down into useable parts. These nutrients are mixed with others, along with our body's biochemicals. Once this has occurred, the nutrients are taken to the bloodstream for use. It is true that nutrients must be broken down into smaller parts, but they also must bond with other digestive elements within the body in order to be carried across the intestinal wall and into the blood. It is the probiotic colonies that police the intestinal membrane; they are in charge

of what gets let out and what is fought off. However, this is towards the end of the process. Once the molecules have made it past the intestinal wall, they are continually watched by the immune system. If everything has been done right, the immune system will give its stamp of approval. If something looks wrong, the particles are identified as foreign by the immune system and removed. Live foods provide nutrients that do not tax the immune system, while dead foods push it to its limit.



Thus, when our immune systems are overburdened due to the consumption of denatured foods, the immune response to the foreign molecules results in inflammation. Harshly processed foods that have been infused with additives disrupt the system. It is difficult for the body to naturally break down foreign particles, because it does not recognize them as useful. In order to break down, the foreign invaders steal from the body's cells and tissues. This produces imbalances which lead to disease.

What Are Live Foods?

Live foods include foods that have been cultured or fermented, mixed with cultured or fermented foods, sprouted grains and beans, plant-based foods that are harvested whole and cooked or processed minimally, and supplements that contain probiotics.

Live foods increase antioxidant levels in the body, encourage detoxification, strengthen

liver function, purify the blood, lower inflammation, provide fiber, put minimal stress on the immune system, increase healthy bacteria and provide a plethora of usable vitamins and nutrients. (Note: if you suffer from severe gastrointestinal distress, stay clear of beans, nightshade vegetables and gluten until you restore balance.)

Fermented Foods

Humans have been consuming fermented foods for thousands of years as a way to preserve foods after harvest; our ancestors did not have refrigerators. Fermenting foods allows probiotic yeast and bacteria to form on the food. During this process, the food is cultured, which allows us to absorb more nutrients. They also add their own nutrients, which help keep our gut flora healthy. Eating foods that are fermented, such as kefir, tempeh, miso or sauerkraut will help flood your gut with healthy, living bacteria.

Healthy Fats

Contrary to what you may think, fats are necessary for healthy living and digestion. The important thing is to make the right choices when it comes to fat. Fats are a main part of the membranes of all the cells in your body; if you did not have fats, cells would have no covering. Fats help protect the body from the outside world, provide energy and support immune, brain and cardiovascular function. There are a number of different fats, but only a few are necessary, since the body cannot make them on its own. These fats must be included in a healthy diet, and include polyunsaturated fats such as omega-6 fatty acid and omega-3 fatty acid, which are found primarily in nuts, fish and seeds. It is

important to note that most people have too much omega-6 and not enough omega-3. To reduce the amount of omega-6, it is necessary to cut back on consumption of soy oil, corn oil, sunflower oil and safflower oil. Saturated fats from grass-fed animals and vegetable sources provide many important health benefits. The body cannot function properly without some saturated fats, as they are vital to the health of the heart, lungs, hormones, liver and immune system. Healthy saturated fat is not found in processed food, but rather in tropical oils such as coconut oil, and in grass-fed meats and organic butter made from raw grass-fed cow's milk. Monosaturated fat, such as olive oil, should also be included in a healthy diet. Trans fats are fake fats that are formed by the process of hydrogenation, and are used to extend the shelf life of processed foods, and to improve their taste. These imposters should be avoided at all costs and are detrimental to health.

Fats act as carriers of fat-soluble vitamins during digestion, and help with their absorption. If you did not include some fats in your diet, your body could not absorb vitamins A, D, E and K, and you would quickly become nutritionally deficient.

Fiber

Fiber is a carbohydrate that travels through the body without breaking down, and is necessary for healthy bowel function. Soluble fiber will dissolve in water, while insoluble fiber will not.

Soluble fiber is fermented by bacteria, absorbs water and takes on a gelatinous texture. Fiber helps prevent and treat constipation, increases the number of bowel movements and makes it easier to pass stool. Fiber helps to escort toxins out of the body and keeps fecal matter from building up.

Some great sources of fiber include beans, peas, carrots, lentils, cabbage, nuts, bananas, spinach, apples and prunes.

Reason Two: Too Much Sugar

The United States' sugar consumption has steadily risen since the 1800s, when a person may have consumed the equivalent of one soda every five days to the equivalent of 19 sodas every five days in 2012. This is equal to 130 pounds of sugar per year. Not surprisingly, with this rise in sugar intake, obesity rates have skyrocketed and our country is plagued with a host of life-threatening lifestyle diseases such as hypertension, diabetes and cancer.

Simple sugars are absorbed at a rapid rate into the bloodstream. An enzyme in the lining of the small intestine breaks down simple sugars, such as table sugar, into glucose and fructose, which is taken in through the intestinal wall. As glucose enters the bloodstream, the glucose levels in the blood rise, which signals to the pancreas to release insulin into the blood. Insulin's job is to clean up the glucose, convert it to

glycogen and deposit it into the liver and muscles. Once the stores in the liver and muscles are filled to capacity, any extra glucose is converted to fat. The pancreas has a full-time job of regulating insulin if we eat diets high in simple sugars. In addition, once the blood sugar levels drop, hormones are released which signal the liver to release stored sugar, which in turn raises blood sugar levels again. This puts a tremendous strain on organs that are not able to fully perform their other jobs associated with digestion. Sugar is indeed a great distraction. This blood sugar roller coaster is to blame for a host of debilitating medical conditions such as hyperactivity, depression, obesity, impaired immunity, allergies, asthma and cancer. Remember, the insult starts in the gut and compromises the immune system, which sets a chain reaction into gear.



Cutting all refined sugar and high fructose corn syrup from the diet is the best remedy for this problem. For many, going “cold turkey” is a challenge, but one that is well worth the time and energy. Without the extra burden of regulating sugar, the pancreas, liver and immune system can work at breaking down and using valuable nutrients for the good of the body. Try switching to natural sweeteners that do not cause a spike in blood sugar, such as stevia or coconut crystals. Raw honey and pure maple syrup can be enjoyed in moderation by those with a healthy gut.

Reason Three: Not Enough Exercise

Eating, exercise and digestion are all interrelated. Recent studies indicate that adopting regular exercise habits can reduce gastrointestinal problems including stomach pain, irritable bowel syndrome, constipation and diarrhea. Exercise increases blood flow throughout the body, including within the digestive system. Just like the rest of your body, your digestive system suffers when you are sedentary. To keep things from becoming sluggish, regular exercise is vital.

Yoga is a very low-impact form of exercise that focuses on bending and stretching the body into poses that enhance blood and energy flow. Yoga professionals recommend twisting poses to increase the blood to the bowels, reduce inflammation and strengthen the intestines. The following are a couple of really good exercises to aid the digestive process:

Seated Twist

- Sit on the floor with your spine erect and your legs out in front of you.
- Bend your left leg so that your left foot is over your right knee; put it on the floor.
- Take a deep breath while facing forward.
- Slowly twist your upper back to your left side and exhale – hold the position for at least 10 seconds. Inhale as you release back to front.
- Switch your leg position and repeat on the other side.

Rock and Roll

- Begin in a seated position with your knees bent.
- Hug your knees close to your chest and wrap your arms around the back of your legs.
- Tuck your head into your chest and gently roll backwards – allow your legs to come over your head. Repeat 16 times.
- This exercise is not only great for digestion, but also as a self-massage.

Tips for Exercise

- Don't eat a large, heavy meal and try to go through a tough workout – your body is working on digestion and you are pulling valuable energy from this process - something will be compromised. Exercising on a full stomach may cause cramps, nausea or vomiting. A light workout such as a brisk walk is best after a large meal.
- Eat healthy, fiber-rich foods such as vegetables and fruits.
- Drink plenty of water before and after each workout – exercise may induce dehydration, which slows digestion.
- Exercise outdoors often – vitamin D, the best source of which is sunlight, helps to control calcium in the digestive system, a necessity for optimal digestion. It also protects from diseases that affect the digestive system. A higher level of vitamin D reduces the risk of colon cancer.

Reason Four: Poor Stress Management

Many people with chronic digestive disorders have a difficult time coping with stress.

Normally, exposure to a stressor causes a flare-up of gastrointestinal symptoms. Other people who have a difficult time with stress may develop headaches, neck pain or even come down with the flu.

Stress can affect every part of the digestive system. The enteric (intestinal) nerve system controls the gut. This system is composed of hundreds of millions of nerve endings that communicate with the central nervous system. When the body is exposed to stress, the “fight or flight” response kicks in, and the central nervous system can shut down blood flow, contract digestive muscles and decrease digestive juices, bringing digestion to a screeching halt. Stress causes inflammation to develop along the gastrointestinal system, which leaves you vulnerable to infection. Under stress, the esophagus can go into spasms while the acid in the stomach increases, causing indigestion. Diarrhea and constipation are common in people who are experiencing stress. While stress may not directly cause such conditions such as ulcers, inflammatory bowel disease, or celiac disease, it can make symptoms worse.

Regular exercise and relaxation exercises are some of the best ways to manage stress. Physical activity releases tension and elevates your mood by releasing endorphins, and

reduces the influence that stress has on internal organs.

Meditation, yoga, mental imaging, biofeedback hypnosis and even listening to music often help people with severe gastrointestinal distress. A recent study found that people with irritable bowel syndrome found relief from bloating, diarrhea and pain when they participated in relaxation therapy.



People who have a difficult time handling stress often find it hard to talk to others about their fears, concerns or anger. Whether you spend time with a trained therapist or just a good friend, venting is a useful way to unload stress. Cognitive behavioral therapy is used by mental health practitioners as a way to teach people stress coping skills. One research study indicated that people with irritable bowel who underwent 12 weeks of cognitive behavioral therapy had a 70% reduction in symptoms.

Relying on junk food, alcohol, tobacco, prescription, over-the-counter or recreational drugs to ease stress can only make matters worse. In addition, as already discussed, a diet high in unhealthy fat and sugar will also create a stressful situation within the body.

Stress is a part of life, and a healthy dose of stress is actually a good thing. Instead of trying to annihilate all stress from your life, choose to work on your coping mechanisms and outlook. Having an optimistic outlook and remaining calm in the face of adversity will keep your digestive system functioning at its best.

Reason Five: Sleep Habits

No matter how you look at it, sleep is important to overall health and well-being. Many people, due to work schedules or other reasons, do not keep a regular sleeping pattern. It is imperative to maintain sleeping habits and never cut sleep out. A sleep-deprived body cannot function as it is intended to function. Without adequate sleep, the body stops working for us and begins to work against us; this includes the digestive system.

In addition to getting enough sleep and sticking to a consistent bedtime and wake time, there are certain sleeping positions that are helpful to promoting healthy digestion. Laying and sleeping on your left side helps the stomach to empty acid in a proper manner.

People who sleep consistently on their right side may experience gas, heartburn, GERD, high acidity and heartburn. You may want to keep your head raised slightly off of

your bed, usually 4 to 6 inches. With a little elevation, gravity will keep the stomach acid where it belongs. If you are too flat on your bed, the acid may rise up towards your esophagus. Do not use two pillows - this may cause neck pain. Neck pillows are recommended for people who find they need a little more support. A body pillow, placed between the legs, helps keep your body aligned, and improves circulation. This relaxed and natural position encourages your body to move food and waste efficiently without pressure that can slow the process down.

It is wise not to eat immediately before going to bed. In fact, for optimal digestion, try to eat your last meal or snack at least 2 to 4 hours before retiring. Digestion works best when the body is in a seated or standing position. Sleeping or lying prone immediately after eating does not allow for adequate blood circulation, or the energy needed for proper digestion. Try to aim for your largest meal of the day to be midday instead of evening. This allows time for the digestive process to get started before you go to bed.



Do not consume foods that act like stimulants in the body prior to going to bed. These foods include peppermint, soda, coffee, chocolate and spicy dishes. These foods are also known to aggravate heartburn.

Reason Six: Smoking and Drinking Alcohol

Smoking

The ill effects of smoking on health are well documented, and include such detriments as lung cancer, heart disease, colon cancer and emphysema. More than 400,000 Americans die each year from cigarette smoking. One in five deaths in our country is related to smoking.



Crohn's Disease

A number of recent studies suggest that smoking may increase one's chance of developing Crohn's disease. The chemicals in cigarettes irritate the intestines and cause inflammation. Smoking also dampens immunity, which leaves the gastrointestinal tract open for infection.

Cancers

Recent research demonstrates that smoking increases the risk of colon cancer, which is one of the leading cancers related to deaths worldwide. Smokers also increase their chances of contracting gastrointestinal cancers including stomach, gallbladder, liver, esophageal, pancreatic and gallbladder cancer. Cigar smoking, in particular, has been linked to cancers in the upper digestive tract.

Liver Disease

The chemicals in cigarettes cause oxidative stress in the liver and encourage the progression of cirrhosis. The liver is also hampered from the stress of removing toxins. If smoking continues, liver damage can be irreversible.

Peptic Ulcers

Most peptic ulcers are related to bacterial infections, reactions to medications or smoking. Peptic ulcers are more common in smokers than non-smokers. This is thought to be caused by the production of gastric acid in smokers, which interferes with gastrointestinal functioning.

Alcohol

Alcohol is toxic, and the body has no use for it. Alcohol has to be oxidized by digestive enzymes so that the liver can get some energy from the sugar and eliminate it from the body. Aldehyde dehydrogenase (ALDH) is the enzyme in the liver

that changes the alcohol from something toxic to acetic acid, also known as vinegar.

The pancreas has a big job to play in neutralizing alcohol as well.

Consumption of large amounts of alcohol interferes with proper digestion of food.

Alcohol depletes the amount of digestive enzymes secreted by the pancreas. Chronic pancreatitis and inflammation of the pancreas occur with chronic alcohol consumption.

Limiting or avoiding alcohol altogether is the best way to protect your health and help ensure proper digestion.

Reason Seven: Not Enough Water

Chronic dehydration is at the root of a host of health problems, digestive disorders included. The human body is comprised of about 72% water. Water is needed for every bodily function, including digestion. Water is one of the most essential nutrients for the body. You can survive a long time without food, but only a few days without water. Water escorts toxins out of the body and transports nutrients where they are needed. We lose water all the time through sweat, breathing and waste removal. If we do not replace this water, we can quickly become dehydrated. Aim for eight to ten glasses of water daily, more if you are exercising or spending time outdoors.

The process of digestion begins with the secretion of saliva, which is mostly comprised of water. Proper digestion depends on enzymes that are contained in the saliva to help break down food and liquids. Water also helps digest soluble fiber, which is essential to bowel health. Many people who are dehydrated have a difficult time going to the bathroom, and develop other digestive discomforts due to lack of water.



Drinking and Eating

Drinking water prior to eating and after eating helps to break down food and flush wastes from the intestines. Water takes up room in the stomach and can help you to eat less. Drinking water with meals may interfere with natural bile and acid production, which can actually slow digestion and cause cramping. The best time to drink water is fifteen minutes before you eat and again an hour after you eat. If you like to drink during your meals, be sure to take small sips, just enough to cleanse the palate without flooding the digestive system. A touch of lemon or apple cider vinegar added to your water will help with digestion. Iced or cold drinks consumed with dinner are particularly hard on the digestion. Opt for warm tea or homemade broth instead. Breaking the habit

of drinking while you are eating may be difficult. Try drinking water immediately upon waking and drinking it throughout the day. This will form good habits, keep the body consistently hydrated, and reduce the craving to consume large amounts of water with your meal.

Understanding pH

If you eat processed foods, chances are your pH is slightly acidic. Most American foods are acid-producing. In addition, a body exposed to toxins such as heavy metals, food additives, bacteria, pesticides, pharmaceuticals and viruses also becomes acidic. Many chronic, degenerative and autoimmune symptoms stem from the body being too acidic.

When the pH in the blood becomes too acidic, the body will try to leech alkalinizing minerals such as calcium and magnesium to buffer the blood. This can lead to osteoporosis - a condition where bone mineral density is reduced resulting in bones that are more likely to break.

When pH is out of order, the stomach cannot make an adequate amount of stomach acids and GERD may occur. When the body senses too little acid, it floods the area with more acid. While antacids help relieve the symptoms temporarily, the problem is not solved.

Measuring your pH levels at home is easy and can be done with urine or saliva. Be sure to take your measurements 4 times a day, between meals, and then average your results. Healthy values are 6.7 – 7.5 with urine and 6.4 to 6.8 with saliva.

Eating a healthy, whole food diet will help to normalize acidity. Foods that are acidic include soda, high-sugar foods, fried foods, and high-fat dairy foods.

Vitamins and Supplements

In addition to making healthy lifestyle changes to support digestion, there are a number of supplements that you may wish to consider. These supplements will help, however, it is important to note that the changes in lifestyle must come first before adding supplements. If you are consuming a highly processed diet, not getting enough exercise and smoking, supplements will be much less effective. In order for high quality vitamins and supplements to work their best, you need to be as healthy as possible first. The following supplements can support a healthy lifestyle:

- Vitamin C
- Probiotics
- Flaxseed
- Peppermint Oil
- Chamomile Tea
- Ginger



- L-Glutamine
- Psyllium
- Artichoke
- Vitamin D
- Raw Honey
- Magnesium

Cleansing/Fasting

One way to give your digestive system the break it needs is to stop asking it to do so much work. This involves taking a break from your “normal” eating routine, and try cleansing or fasting occasionally. Cleansing the colon gets rid of the toxins and fecal matter buildup that contribute to toxic overload. A cleanse may involve a number of supportive herbs that encourage detoxification along with eating a “clean” diet, while a fast may be a complete break from eating, eating only clean foods, or drinking only fresh vegetable juice. If you have consumed an unhealthy diet for a long period of time and have never given your digestive system a break, a cleanse or a fast is an excellent way to pave the foundation for great health. It is important to always check with a healthcare provider before undertaking a cleansing or a fasting program.

For a simple daily cleanse, try drinking the juice of 2 lemons in a glass of warm filtered water. This routine helps to rid the stomach of excess acid and leftovers from digestion.

Homemade Digestive Tonics

For those times when your stomach is just not quite right (perhaps you ate something you should not have), you can try these homemade stomach soothers to get things back to normal.

Mint Leaf Tea: Chop up some fresh mint leaves and put them in a boiling cup of water. Drink after eating to help relieve inflammation and help with digestion.

Ginger Root Tea: Add a small piece of ginger root to a boiling cup of water, add a little raw honey and drink after a meal for a soothing, warm digestive aid.

Cleansing Tonic: Mix 1 teaspoon of organic, unpasteurized apple cider vinegar with ½ teaspoon raw honey in one cup of warm water. You can also add a little lemon juice.

Bonus Section!

The Best and Worst Foods for Digestion

Top 12 Foods for Healthy Digestion

Garlic

Garlic is what is known as a prebiotic. It feeds healthy bacteria in the gut while destroying the unhealthy bacteria. It acts like a really nice housekeeper. It takes away all the dust and leaves fresh folded towels on your bed with a couple of mints. Not only does it do a really great job taking out the trash but it leaves a refreshing surprise behind. Garlic is best consumed fresh and raw. For optimal digestive health, chop up a teaspoonful each night before going to bed. You will not, surprisingly have garlic breath or a garlic smell seeping out your pores but you will have a really healthy gut.

Asparagus

Asparagus is widely known for its digestive health benefits. Also a prebiotic - asparagus is rich in inulin which is a type of carbohydrate also known as a polyfructan. This carbohydrate is not like the ordinary carbohydrate that gets broken down in the digestive tract. Rather inulin passes through the digestive tract all the way to the large intestine. It arrives in the digestive tract, unbroken where it becomes a food source for friendly bacteria. So, in a sense when you eat asparagus you are feeding your friendly

bacteria. Research shows that eating asparagus on a regular basis helps with nutrient absorption and also lowers the risk of colon cancer and allergies.

Bananas

Bananas are a favorite fruit of many people and fun to eat. But, they are also incredibly beneficial to the digestive tract. They have powerful antacid effects which help to protect the stomach from ulcers and ulcers damage. Studies have shown that mixing bananas in milk suppressed acid secretion. Bananas have even been found to protect animals' stomachs from wounds. Bananas trigger cells in the stomach lining to create a thick and protective mucus barrier that keeps stomach acids out. In addition, bananas get rid of bacteria that can cause stomach ulcers.

Bananas contain soluble fiber that helps to move foodstuff through the digestive tract and ease constipation and are an excellent source of potassium which helps to regulate heart function and fluid balance.

Consume bananas when they are moderately ripe - the riper they are the greater impact they will have on the glycemic index.

Apples

Research indicates that an apple a day will keep digestive bacteria healthy and plentiful. Studies on laboratory animals indicate that apples have an impact on two bacteria in the

large intestine, which creates positive changes in metabolism in the intestine. The metabolic changes provide more fuel for the cells in the large intestine. Scientists expect that similar results will be found in humans very soon.

Apples, in their whole form, are also a good source of dietary fiber. Fiber in apples combines with nutrients in the apple to protect for heart disease and regulate blood fat levels. It is better to avoid conventional (non-organic) apples, however. They are often near the top of the list of offending “Dirty Dozen” fruits and vegetables - those that contain the highest concentrations of pesticides.

Beets

Both beets and greens are loaded with fiber which makes them great for maintaining regularity. They also do a great job keeping the digestive tract lining and smooth muscles functioning at top speed. Beets provide a huge nutritional punch and are loaded with potassium and magnesium. The greens are tasty as well and are a rich source of iron, calcium and beta-carotene. Steam beets for about ten minutes and greens for about 5 minutes for best taste. Be careful not to eat beets more than twice a week as they may weaken the enamel on your teeth.

Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes are one of the most nutritious vegetables. They contain important vitamins and minerals including vitamin B6, potassium and iron. Sweet potatoes also

provide a substantial amount of dietary fiber, especially if you leave the skin on. There is more fiber in one medium-sized sweet potato than can be found in a bowl of oatmeal. This fiber increases bulk in the colon and may dilute carcinogens that are found in food or formed as a result of digestion. The vitamin A in sweet potatoes helps to maintain strong tissues and a healthy immune system. It also helps protect us from cardiovascular disease and has been shown to reduce the risk of stroke.

Avocados

Avocados are richer in fiber than any other fruit, containing 15 grams per medium-size fruit. The healthy monounsaturated raw fat in avocados is essential for digestive tract health. These fats support healthy pancreas, gallbladder and liver function. In addition, monounsaturated fats promote the conversion of beta-carotene into vitamin A which is necessary for a healthy digestive tract lining. Shop for avocados that are slightly firm and not overly ripe.

Blueberries

Blueberries, one of the only truly blue foods, are native to North America and an excellent addition to any healthy diet for many reasons. Anthocyanin is what gives blueberries their deep blue color and is also a powerful disease-preventing antioxidant. Blueberries are known as a functional food because they contain a great deal of fiber and phytochemicals which are beneficial for to induce regularity and prevent constipation. Blueberries contain the highest number of antioxidants out of 40 other

fruits and vegetables. Lutein reduces the risk of colon cancer while resveratrol protects against linoleic acid (a fatty acid present in Western diets) which promotes colon cancer. Piceatannol, another antioxidant has been shown to halt the growth of cancer cells and ellagic acid is a proven anti-cancer chemical that targets colon and esophageal cancers.

Toss fresh blueberries in your morning fruit cup, oats, smoothie or organic yogurt. Eat them fresh and cold as heat destroys some of their nutrients.

Whole Oats Soaked

Whole oats are a nutrient-rich food but the nutrients are hard for the body to absorb unless the oats are first soaked. Enzyme inhibitors are substances that plants use to protect seeds but they can almost completely prevent digestion and absorption of whole grains. Phosphorus, in the bran of whole grains is locked up by phytic acid. This acid mixes with magnesium, iron, calcium, copper and zinc in the intestines and blocks their absorption. In addition, whole grains contain enzyme blockers which get in the way of proper digestion. Traditional cultures around the world soak grain overnight which mimics pre-digestion and allows nutrients to be absorbed and used by the body.

Soaking can be done by adding oats to filtered water with 1 tablespoon of lemon juice or vinegar. Buttermilk or kefir also neutralizes the nutrient blockers. After oats have soaked for 24 hours, rinse and enjoy.

In the pre-digested form, whole oats are an excellent source of dietary fiber that has been shown to regulate blood sugar, reduce cholesterol and promote digestive health. The insoluble and soluble fiber in oats promotes regularity and keeps toxins moving through the digestive tract at a rapid pace. The fiber also makes you feel full which may reduce cravings and promote healthy weight management.

Cantaloupe

Cantaloupes are lovely sweet fruits that contain detoxifiers and disease-fighting compounds. Rich in antioxidants vitamins A and C, cantaloupes support a healthy immune function and promote digestive health. Although the fruit is really sweet, it contains a great deal of fiber which allows the sugar to enter the bloodstream slowly, keeping blood sugar levels regulated. The high water content acts like a mild diuretic in the body which encourages detoxification. Because cantaloupe is very easy to digest, it gives your stomach and other digestive organs a break. Digestive health is dependent on having a break from time to time. Cantaloupe is the perfect nutritious, low calorie way to give your digestive system the rest it deserves. Eat them seasonally and when ripe. There are a great deal of nutrients in the rind and seeds - don't be afraid to eat these as well.

Kiwis

In addition to being a rich source of vitamin C, kiwis contain a great deal of fiber. In fact, one small kiwi has about the same fiber as a medium-sized apple. The dietary fiber in

kiwis encourages regular and soft stools which prevents constipation. Research has also indicated that consuming dietary fiber reduces the risk of hemorrhoids and diverticulosis and may prevent some cancers.

Peaches

Peaches are low in calories but deliver a huge nutritional punch. They are almost 80% water but also contain fiber, minerals and carotenoids. The fiber in peaches is like a gentle laxative which aids digestion and protects from cancer. Vitamin A and vitamin C reduce the risk of heart disease and iron and potassium helps to ensure proper cellular function, fluid balance and nerve signaling. Like other fruits and veggies, it is best to leave the skin on because a lot of the nutrients are found in the fruit's natural protective covering. Leave the pit alone - it contains a toxic substance that is known as hydrocyanic acid.

It is better to avoid conventional (non-organic) peaches, however. They are also often on the list of offending “Dirty Dozen” fruits and vegetables.

Top 9 Worst Foods or Foodstuffs for Digestion

Gluten

Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye, barley and other food additives. For some time now, people who have been diagnosed with digestive disorders such as celiac disease have been told to cut out all gluten. While it is true that these people have a difficult time digesting the protein, most people have an adverse reaction to the protein but may not recognize it for what it truly is.

To know whether or not you have a sensitivity, it is a good idea to try a gluten-free diet for some time. Many people find that they lose weight and have relief from a number of nagging health conditions that they had never attributed to gluten. This may include anything from emotional instability, gastrointestinal issues, rashes, joint pain or chronic fatigue.

Gluten contains gliadin, which becomes water soluble and binds with cells in the body. Those that may be sensitive make antibodies to gliadin and attack the cells that the gliadin is attached to - treating the cells like an infection. This damages the tissue and can exacerbate a number of potentially serious health conditions in the body. It is also now being discovered that gluten can impact the brain and cause symptoms associated with schizophrenia. Gluten is a pro-inflammatory which also creates a welcoming environment for adverse health conditions to develop.

Gluten hides in a number of processed and ready-made foods such as soups, candies, cold meats, most soy sauce, low and nonfat products and refined grain including pizza crust, pasta, cookies, bread and pastries.

Cutting out gluten means basically switching to a whole food diet, which is definitely healthier for everyone. Be sure if you cut out gluten that you are replacing it with healthy foods such as organic fruits and veggies. Avoid processed, gluten-free foods - they may be gluten-free but they contain ingredients that will only promote weight gain and other health conditions. Gluten-free does not necessarily mean healthy!

It can take anywhere from 30 to 90 days or even longer to feel better once you become gluten-free. And unfortunately, cheating when you go gluten-free is almost as bad as not being gluten-free at all. Your body truly needs a complete break from gluten for you to enjoy the benefits a gluten-free lifestyle provides.

Pasteurized Dairy Products

Louis Pasteur's 'Germ Theory of Disease', was one of those "discoveries" that sent the western culture running from all germs and bacteria. Our conventional medical system is still based on this now, outdated understanding of germs. However, due to this misunderstanding regarding germs, the dairy industry starting destroying what is truly one of nature's most nutrient-dense and purest foods: raw milk.

When milk is put through the pasteurization process, much of the vitamins including B-12, B-6, C and A are destroyed. That is not all that is annihilated, all the beneficial bacteria, enzymes and milk proteins are also squashed. Ironically, because all of the beneficial bacteria is destroyed, pasteurized dairy becomes the perfect breeding ground for possibly harmful bacteria and pathogens. Calves that are fed pasteurized milk often die before maturity.

Homogenization oxidizes milk fats and makes them toxic to the body. An enzyme known as Xanthine Oxidase results from the process of homogenization which has shown to stick to arterial walls and contribute towards heart disease.

Unfermented Soy

Soy is marketed as a health food and it is easy to get confused about it. While people in Japan are very healthy and consume a great deal of soy, the soy that they consume is not like the soy that is marketed by our soy industry here in the United States. Not all soy is created equally and not all soy products are good for the body.

Unfermented soy contains "anti-nutrients" which are toxins. These toxins interfere with the enzymes that are needed to digest protein. While the body can handle a small amount of these toxins, Americans are consuming more and more which puts a tremendous strain on the digestive system. In addition, soy is one of the most genetically modified crops in America.

Fermented soy such as soy sauce, miso, natto and tempeh are better than unfermented soy such as tofu, soy milk, soy protein, soybeans and soy oil.

Refined Sugar

The average person consumes over 150 pounds of sugar per year. That is about one-half a cup each day. Even if you think you are going light on refined sugar, it hides in many places. Sugar wreaks havoc on every bodily system, it rots teeth, it promotes obesity and it has absolutely no nutritional value.

What sugar does to the digestive system is nothing short of a disaster. Sugar rips through the digestive tract fueling on bacteria and yeast causing inflammation, suppressing immune system function and causing an imbalance in gut flora. Once the imbalance occurs, it creates the perfect breeding ground for disease. Sugar also promotes inflammation. People who suffer from inflammatory bowel disease need to run from sugar (the rest of us should do the same).

Once sugar is removed from the diet, metabolism speeds up and this results in improved digestion, which reduces the risk of such conditions as diverticulitis and irritable bowel syndrome.

Fake Fats

Also known as trans fat, hydrogenated oils are made by super-heating vegetable oil and adding hydrogen. This allows the oil to cool in a solid form. However the process of hydrogenation leaves behind a deadly fake fat.

The body knows exactly what to do with natural fat, but not this synthetic substance. Because the digestive system has no idea what to do with trans fats they are thought to accumulate in the body. This is one of the reasons why a diet high in trans fat can make you fat. Trans fats also interfere with cellular communication and movement.

Fake fats cause bloating, gas, cramps and loose stools and do not allow the intestines to absorb nutrients.

Artificial Sweeteners

Don't think that you are doing yourself a favor if you cut out refined sugar and replace it with an artificial sweetener. Artificial sweeteners are nothing short of toxic sludge to the human body. Like sugar, artificial sweeteners disrupt gut flora resulting in an imbalance of unhealthy flora. Studies show that artificial sweeteners decrease healthy gut bacteria - which is cause for alarm. They also cause excessive gas and bloating.

The body cannot detoxify adequately when faced with artificial sweeteners and eventually, like other chemicals, the more we consume the more fatty cells we create.

Like hydrogenated oils and refined sugar, artificial sweeteners should be treated as an invader and a threat to digestive health. But the biggest problem with these are the neuro-excitability they induce - which can result in serious neurological and behavioural issues.

Night Shade Vegetables

This includes tomatoes, peppers, white potatoes and eggplant; all members of the Solanaceae family. This group all contain compounds that can encourage leaky gut and decrease energy in cells. If you have a stressed gastrointestinal tract already, it is best to avoid these until you are healthy. Once healthy, your body will be able to process them when eaten in moderation.

Conclusion

The digestive system is the powerhouse of the body and has the major responsibilities of breaking down foods for energy and escorting waste products out the back door. The performance of this system depends on many things, including largely what we put into it for fuel. Do we fuel this massive and most important system the healthiest raw materials possible or do we shortchange it and hope for the best? This is a personal question that each of us must answer on our journey towards better health. Under the

right conditions, the digestive system works in harmony with other systems to maintain wellness and defend the body from invasion of those things destined to destroy the inner balance.

We hope that the information presented in this book offers practical insight and resources to help you achieve the best digestive health possible!

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