

Healing Arts Update

A guide for wellness.

March 2007

About 90 percent of all disease can originate in the digestive tract. For optimal health, proper digestion, absorption and elimination are vital. The best nutrition in the world will go to waste if your body is unable to process it efficiently.

Incomplete digestion and mal-absorption can put you at risk for serious health issues. In the US, more than 70 million people suffer with digestive diseases. This month we take a closer look at how your digestive system absorbs food and nutrients.

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NUTRITION+YOU

Proper absorption stems from good digestion. Good digestion starts with healthy eating habits. Here are some simple tips.



Chew all your food into a paste before swallowing. This helps ensure that you are creating sufficient saliva. The amylase enzyme, found in saliva, helps soften food and also aids in the digestion of carbs.

Eat well-balanced meals. Generally, each meal should include 75 percent vegetables and fruits, 13 percent protein and "good" fats, and 12 percent grains and fiber--all of which are better if organic.

Be conscious of what you eat and portion sizes. Over consumption is a frequent cause of indigestion. It takes about 10 minutes for your brain to signal that you're actually full.

Don't eat late at night. Your digestive system slows down in the evening hours as it prepares to rest and rejuvenate. When you put food into your stomach at night, there aren't enough digestive enzymes to properly digest it. Consequently, this undigested food sits in your stomach, often disrupting your sleep.

Drink plenty of water. Proper digestion requires water for mixing and processing of foods. Ideally, your daily water intake in ounces should equal 50 percent of your weight in pounds. For optimal digestion, avoid drinking water with your meals. If possible, drink at least a half-hour before meals or one to three hours after meals.

WELL BEING by John Patton, AP, LMHC



Your body obtains the energy it needs from at least 40 nutrients found in food. However, until the food you eat has been digested, absorbed into the bloodstream, and distributed throughout the body, your body doesn't benefit from these nutrients.

Absorption is the most important part of digestion and takes place in the small intestine, which is divided into three segments. The duodenum is the first 10 to 12 inches, the middle portion is the jejunum and is about eight feet long, and the third segment is the ileum, which is about 12 feet long.

The duodenum is where most chemical digestion and the absorption of minerals occur. Absorption of water-soluble vitamins, carbohydrates and protein takes place in the jejunum. The ileum is where fat,

WE'RE GLAD YOU ASKED



Q: No matter what I eat, it seems I always have a lot of gas. Is there anything I can do?

A: Everyone has gas in their digestive tract. About 90 percent of gas is caused by swallowed air. The following tips may help you cut down on the amount of air you swallow.

Eat your meals slowly and try to relax while you eat. Participate in mealtime conversations, but don't talk a lot while eating. During the day, avoid chewing gum, hard candies and carbonated beverages.

Normal bacteria in your digestive tract produces the remaining 10 percent of gas from the food you eat. Certain foods in your diet may contribute to problems with gas. These foods include milk and milk products, dried beans, peas, lentils, high-fiber foods, foods sweetened with sorbitol, such as sugar-free gum and candy, and foods that contain high amounts of fructose.

Of course, if you eliminate all the foods that might cause gas, it might mean cutting out many nutritious foods that your body needs. If you do identify foods that are "gas triggers" for you, try eating less of those foods rather than not eating them at all.

A chronic post-nasal drip also can cause you to swallow air. If this is the case, consult your healthcare professional.

Have a question?

VIP (Very Important Product)

For optimal digestion and absorption, the Healing Arts Center carries three very important products.

The Healing Arts Center's Allzyme Plus contains antioxidants and enzymes that support the body's natural response to inflammation and allergens. Vitamin C buffered with magnesium are key ingredients to help eliminate acidity and support histamine metabolism and detoxification processes. This supplement can be particularly useful if you suffer with allergens that affect the respiratory system.

Probiotics Plus is a high-potency supplement that supplies essential intestinal microorganisms, promotes intestinal balance, and supports both gastrointestinal and immune system functions.

Gastro Pak Plus is an intestinal ecology support product. Comprised of select fatty acids, probiotics, prebiotics, amino acids and botanicals, it helps rebalance intestinal flora and nourish GI cells.

cholesterol, and fat-soluble vitamins are absorbed.

Your body absorbs different nutrients at different speeds. Carbs are digested most rapidly, followed by proteins and finally fats. Vitamin and mineral supplements typically are small enough for the body to absorb without breaking them down first, with water-soluble vitamins absorbed faster than fat-soluble ones.

The absorbed nutrients pass through the bloodstream to the liver. Here, liver cells detoxify the blood of harmful substances (such as alcohol) and store fat-soluble vitamins and excess substances (such as glucose) for release when your body requires an extra boost of energy.

Compromised function of the small intestine can result in serious health repercussions including dehydration, electrolyte imbalance and malnutrition. Identifying and addressing certain conditions such as food intolerance or food allergies, lactose intolerance, lack of digestive secretions, low immune status and too much sugar in the diet can help correct your absorption problems.

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