

CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION: an end to digestive problems through proper nutrition

By Rodd Stockwell, MD

If you or someone you love, experiences digestive problems, consider an assessment of the foods you eat. With conscious attention to what you place in your mouth and how it is prepared, you will find that small changes in your diet can lead to relief. In addition, conscious consumption of food leads you to a greater sense of self-control over your digestive illness: you are not at the mercy of food, nor are you a victim of your illness. Change is never easy, but when you are committed to being well, and willing to experiment, a new you can emerge feeling vibrant and healthy.

What are digestion problems?

Problems with digestion include food allergies, constipation, diarrhea, heartburn, irritable bowel syndrome, and the inflammatory bowel diseases including Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. They run the spectrum from annoying to life threatening.

What is digestion?

Proper, healthy digestion is the result of a dance between the food we take in and our digestive tract: mouth, esophagus, stomach, liver, gall bladder, pancreas, small and large intestine. Vitamins, minerals, and enzymes bind to the food we eat in order to break it down, so that we can absorb all we need to be energetic and healthy.

What gets in the way of healthy digestion?

Digestive problems begin when food is incompletely broken down in the digestive tract. Our bodies cannot break down, and absorb, food that is deficient in micronutrients. If our body does not contain healthy microorganisms in the digestive tract, then food is even harder to digest. In time, digestive symptoms arise such as abdominal pains, bloating, gas, and/or diarrhea. When food is not broken down properly, it can enter the bloodstream where it can bloom into a food allergy. If it remains in the stomach, heartburn may occur. Modern food processing technology, cooking and heating practices, and the use of pesticides and other toxins limit the vital nutrients in food.

What types of food help digestion?

A good example of the digestive system at work is found in raw dairy products. Raw milk contains proteins, fats, and carbohydrates (sugars) called *macronutrients*. Raw milk from healthy, grass fed, pasture raised cows will also contain the *micronutrients* (vitamins, minerals, and enzymes) needed for the milk to be digested. As the milk enters the environment of the mouth, enzymes in it are activated and begin

carbohydrate breakdown. In the stomach, protein-digesting enzymes are activated. In the small intestine, fat-digesting enzymes break down fats into fatty acids. The body is able to utilize the full nutritional value of raw milk because it contains the components required for complete digestion.

Milk that is ultra-pasteurized (a process of heating the milk before it is poured into cartons) has lost most of the natural enzymes and nutrients because they are very sensitive to heat. This means that supermarket milk does not provide our bodies with the natural enzymes to digest it. When a person has difficulty digesting milk, we call that lactose intolerance. Most people who think they are lactose intolerant are quite capable of digesting raw milk or raw cheeses because these foods contain the micronutrients the body needs to digest them.

What is the role of healthy bacteria?

Our digestive tract is loaded with healthy microorganisms that help us digest our foods. When antibiotics enter the body, they kill off invading bacteria, but also kill natural and essential bacteria that belong in the digestive tract. The loss of these bacteria can create digestive problems as well.

What foods provide the greatest nutritional value to our bodies?

Your diet should contain most of the following types of foods:

- Organic fruits and vegetables
- Butter, not imitations
- Yogurt and milk, the less pasteurized the better
- Organic, free-range eggs
- Organically fed, free-roaming, or pasture-raised meats
- Unrefined sea salt
- Bone broths or old-fashioned soup stock
- Lacto-fermented foods

What are lacto-fermented foods?

Lacto-fermented or enzyme-enhanced foods use a natural preservation method. Types include pickles, sauerkraut, homemade ketchup, mustard, chutneys or relishes. These homemade condiments were staples in the diets of our ancestors because of the nutritional punch they packed. That is not the case today, as most condiments are processed, full of sugars and flavorings, and contain little enhanced nutritional value.

Are there specific foods that help specific digestive problems?

Constipation. A person with chronic constipation can easily remedy the situation by eating daily a cup of organic yogurt made with live culture, until symptoms disappear.

Heartburn. An inadequate supply of micronutrients in food leads to increased acid production. Heartburn is the result of subsequently having too much acid in the

stomach. Because they are micronutrient-dense, raw or lacto-fermented foods aid digestion. In turn this results in a normal amount of acid production in the stomach and the complete alleviation of heartburn symptoms.

What is a holistic approach to digestive problems?

A good example is ulcerative colitis, which is an inflammation or bleeding of the intestines. Persons with this disease often take steroids to stop the inflammation, which can lead to a cycle of dependence. When the lining of the intestines heals properly, inflammation retreats and the disease subsides. Many natural (homeopathic) remedies support the healing of the lining and restore the natural functioning of the intestines. Changes in diet are also required to ensure that the right balance of micronutrients is present to help the body maintain its natural functioning after the lining has healed.

Where can I find more information about digestive problems and proper nutrition?

The Schwarzbein Principle, Diana Schwarzbein, MD

Life without Bread, Christian Alan, PhD and Wolfgang Lutz, MD

Eat Fat, Lose Fat, Sally Fallon and Mary Enig, PhD

Nutrition and Physical Degeneration, Weston A. Price, DDS

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