



**25**  
**STRATEGIES**  
*to improve your*  
**DIGESTION**

Simple strategies to get relief from gas, bloating,  
abdominal pain, indigestion, and constipation

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## 25 Strategies To Improve Your Digestion

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Digestive disorders are truly a health crisis today. It is estimated that close to 70 million Americans suffer with some type of digestive disorder. These digestive disorders include conditions such as chronic constipation, diverticular disease, acid reflux disease, hemorrhoids, inflammatory bowel disease, excessive gas and bloating, ulcers and irritable bowel syndrome. Other digestive conditions not recognized in these numbers include SIBO, Candida overgrowth, and other forms of gut dysbiosis. The real number is probably much higher than 70 million.

These digestive diseases are responsible for 50 million visits to the doctor each year, more than any other type of medical problem. Besides symptoms obviously related to digestion problems, many doctors suspect that digestion-related issues may be responsible for other diseases such as diabetes, kidney and gall stones, varicose veins, rheumatoid arthritis, gout, hypertension, and obesity. Then there is the gut-brain axis too. There are researched connections between the gut and depression, low mood, and anxiety.

### What Is The Digestive System?

Let's start with the basics. Roughly speaking, the digestive system is made up of the stomach, the intestines, the pancreas, the liver, the gallbladder, and the esophagus. Any part of the digestive system may be disrupted. But, as Hippocrates (the father of modern medicine) once said, "All disease begins in the gut."

Since proper digestion is the cornerstone to good health, it's no wonder those that suffer from digestive disorders tend to feel ill on many levels. Digestion is responsible for providing essential nutrients to your entire body, so a misfiring digestive tract may lead to fatigue, memory problems, a weakened immune system, or even depression.

There are a number of things that pretty much everyone can do to improve their digestion. Most involve simple changes of habit, or the addition or subtraction of food from the diet. We're going to take a look at 25 of those strategies in this ebook.

As always, be sure to visit a doctor before starting any new regimen to insure that there isn't something more serious causing your digestive distress.

## 1. Eat Less Processed Food

Eating fewer processed foods will help you digest your foods better. While people may understand that processed foods aren't as good for you as raw or unprocessed foods, how many know exactly why this is true?

First of all, processed food often lacks fiber. The Institute of Medicine recommends that fiber intake be about 38 grams for men under 50 years old and about 25 grams for women under 50. If you eat too much processed food, chances are that you aren't getting enough fiber.

You should also know that not all dietary fiber is the same. There are two kinds – soluble and insoluble. Many processed foods contain synthetic additives that allow them to be called a good source of fiber. Usually, it is insoluble fiber that is added.

In a 2007 editorial, Tan and Seow-Choen, researchers in Singapore, called insoluble fiber (the kind added to processed foods) the “ultimate junk food” because it is neither digestible nor absorbable and therefore has no nutritional value. They point out the irony that adding fiber to foods lacking fiber may cause them to be even less nutritious than if the fiber hadn't been added. The problem, they state, is that excess insoluble fiber binds to essential nutrients such as zinc, magnesium, calcium and iron, preventing their uptake into the body's system.

Of course, there are many healthy, natural sources of insoluble fiber. It can help to bulk to your stool, and enables food to pass more quickly through your stomach and intestines. But if the majority of the fiber that you eat is insoluble, it can start to negatively affect the way you digest your food.

Foods that you should avoid include most crackers and chips, breakfast cereals, and processed meats such as bacon and salami. Here's a general rule: if there are more than three or four ingredients on the label, that's probably a bad thing!

## 2. Stay Hydrated

It's very important to stay hydrated throughout the day to keep your stool soft and easy to pass. Water is needed in the stomach to maintain a healthy mucosal lining, which in turn supports the good bacteria in the small intestines as they break down food and absorb nutrients.

While it's vitally important to drink enough water, it's also necessary to check the quality of that water. Sometimes, additives such as chlorine, chloramines, and fluoride are added to municipal water supplies for purification purposes. While they are generally safe at low levels, they can still affect the composition of your gut flora. For those with sensitivities, even low levels of these chemicals can cause intestinal discomfort and indigestion.

Those who drink well-water face the opposite problem, especially if the water is near any kind of concentration of animals. The bacteria entering the water may not get killed, and the water may not be as pure as you imagine.

The best solution to both problems is to purchase a water filter that removes as many contaminants as possible. A reverse osmosis system is a good example. Removing the chemicals and impurities from the water will almost certainly improve your digestive health.

### 3. Move Around

Exercise can affect the digestive system in both good and bad ways. Furthermore, different types of exercise can have different effects. According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), full digestion takes something like 53 hours on average. Certain exercises can improve the efficiency of the digestive system, whereas others can compromise it.

Light exercise, such as riding a bike or walking, can help to reduce the heartburn associated with certain digestive problems. Light exercise increases blood flow to the organs and stimulates muscles in the digestive tract. It increases the heart rate and breathing and promotes more efficient bowel movements. This kind of exercise stimulates the intestinal muscles, encouraging them to move contents through the digestive system.

On the other hand, heavy exercising (such as running) can actually promote digestive problems. Runners who train hard often complain of diarrhea, nausea, and acid reflux. Vigorous exercise can increase cortisol production, which temporarily slows down your digestive processes as resources are switched to your sympathetic nervous system (the 'fight or flight' reaction).

Also remember that it's best not to exercise on a full stomach; wait about two hours after a large meal to begin your exercise routine.

## 4. Eat Fermented Foods

You can heal your gut by repopulating it with the beneficial bacterial that aid in digestion. Most of us acquire these bacteria during birth or early childhood, but influences like broad-spectrum antibiotics and a high sugar diet can lead to dramatic and unwanted changes. The easiest way to restore balance in these beneficial bacteria is by eating fermented foods. While this may sound unappetizing, you might already eat a good deal of fermented food, perhaps without realizing it.

A number of foods are fermented, and some are staples of our diets. Sauerkraut, yogurt, kefir, kombucha (a fermented tea), and kimchee are all examples of fermented foods. Each is high in probiotics, or beneficial bacteria. Not only do these good bacteria aid in digestion, but they also assist in hormone production, the breakdown of nutrients, and the development of a strong immune system.

However, be careful what you buy. Store-bought fermented foods, in some cases, may defeat the whole purpose of eating fermented foods. Sometimes these foods are laden with salt or sugar, can be over-processed, or are pasteurized. Pasteurization involves cooking the food at a high heat, which kills both bad and good bacteria. What you really want is raw fermented foods. Making your own is usually the best solution, and is usually pretty easy!

## 5. Limit Alcohol Consumption

Despite the advice above to eat fermented foods, some fermented drinks can be quite harmful. Fermented drinks such as beer, wine, or other alcoholic beverages are bad news if you already have issues with your gut health.

Alcoholic beverages irritate the stomach lining, change liver metabolism, weaken your immune system and much more. Depending on how much you drink, they might also affect your long-term ability to manage your blood sugars.

And of course, our decision-making tends to go out of the window after a few alcoholic drinks! Alcohol reduces self-control and willpower, which often leads us to eat low quality or processed foods.

## 6. Feed Your Stomach Acid

While it may seem hard to believe, heartburn, acid reflux, abdominal bloating and other digestive system issues are often the result of *too little stomach acid* rather than too much. These symptoms often prompt people to buy antacids, furthering the problem.

When food enters the lower stomach, hydrochloric acid is released, which triggers the release of the digestive enzyme called pepsin. This sterilizes the food before it enters the gastrointestinal tract. Low stomach acid interferes with this process, and causes a myriad of problems, including iron and magnesium deficiencies. Furthermore, large amounts of food that isn't fully digested may enter the intestines.

Sometimes heartburn relief can be counter-intuitive. Instead of antacids, reach for apple cider vinegar or lemon juice. As a preventative measure, especially if you suffer from frequent heartburn, mix the juice of a fresh squeezed lemon and one tablespoon of apple cider vinegar into a glass of warm water at breakfast time.

## 7. Chew Your Food

In this case, it turns out that your parents' advice is pretty good. In our fast-paced world we often 'inhale' our foods. This is usually because we have a limited time in which to eat the meal. Many people only get a 30 minute lunch break, and that includes walking out the office and coming back!

Equally, eating a slow, sit-down breakfast may be impractical if you have two kids to get ready for school. If we eat any breakfast at all, it's usually on the run.

Chewing is not only the first stage of digestion, but it also signals the organs to secrete digestive juices, including saliva and stomach acid. These help with the breakdown of foods, and enable you to extract nutrients from your foods more effectively. Chewing your food well also signals the brain when your stomach has had enough, so it switches off your hunger more quickly.

At first, it helps to count your chews. Aim for about 20 chews per bite. Not only will you start feeling fuller faster, but your body will be able to harvest nutrients better and you'll enjoy your food more. And the most important benefit is that your digestion will improve.

## 8. Probiotic Supplements

Probiotic supplements have been shown, time and time again, to improve your digestion. Probiotic bacteria are live organisms that are similar to the microorganisms normally found in your gut. These microorganisms break up your food and makes nutrients available to your body. They also strengthen the immune system and reduce inflammation.

It's usually better to get probiotics from the food you eat. Sauerkraut, kefir and probiotic yogurt are good examples. However, probiotic supplements are also a practical, effective option. Probiotics have been shown to improve indigestion, along with other gastrointestinal problems such as diarrhea and constipation. They are a great way to recover gut bacteria after an antibiotic regimen.

Look for supplements that contain at least 10 billion live bacteria (the amount that's usually consumed in a small container of yogurt). Supplements that contain several types of probiotics are preferable to those that contain only one type. Most commercial probiotics contain one or more strains of *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *Lactobacillus fermentum* and/or *Lactobacillus rhamnosus*, as well as *Bifidobacteria bifidum* and/or *Bifidobacteria longum*.

It's best to take probiotic supplements shortly before or during a meal. This gives them the best chance possible to make it through your stomach acid and effectively colonize your gut.

When buying a probiotic supplement, look for one that has a delivery system to get the bacteria past your stomach acid. It should contain lots of probiotic bacteria (at least 5 billion CFUs) and multiple probiotic strains.

The Balance One probiotic fits all these criteria. It uses market-leading BIO-tract technology to protect its bacteria from stomach acid. It contains 15 billion CFUs of bacteria and 12 probiotic strains. It's also vegetarian, non-GMO, lactose-free, nut-free, and contains no artificial preservatives, flavors, or coloring.

You can find our probiotic in our [online store](#) or on [Amazon.com](#)



## 9. Manage Your Stress

When we are stressed, our bodies release a hormone named cortisol. Along with adrenaline, this is commonly known as one of your 'stress hormones'.

Cortisol has many functions. If you are super-stressed and your body is producing too much cortisol, it can slow down your digestive system. This is a part of your 'fight or flight' reaction that diverts resources to crucial, life-saving bodily functions. Your saliva production slows, and your digestive system simply stops doing many of its jobs.

Equally, low cortisol can cause problems too. Cortisol is like the 'off switch' for inflammation, and low cortisol means increased inflammation in your digestive tract and elsewhere. Chronic stress can, over time, affect your ability to produce cortisol in sufficient amounts.

## 10. Use Essential Oils

If you're suffering from indigestion, there are several essential oils that may bring relief. Not only do these essential oils help aid indigestion, they may also prevent it with regular use.

The essential oils most effective against indigestion include lemon, lemongrass, myrrh, fennel, ginger, peppermint and patchouli oils. Not only do they relieve indigestion, but some also have side benefits of being anti-inflammatory, antifungal and anti-parasitical.

Take care when using essential oils. Try small amounts first to be sure you have no allergic reactions. For the most part, essential oils are safe and free of harmful side effects when used properly. Before applying to skin, apply to a small area first. When in doubt, seek professional guidance.

## 11. Avoid Foods that Irritate Your Digestive System

Many people have digestive troubles following the ingestion of foods like gluten, dairy, corn, soy, nuts, eggs, chocolate, coffee, or spicy foods.

Avoiding gluten is particularly important for those with Candida or some other form of gut irritation. If you are already suffering from a disturbed gut flora and a permeable

intestinal lining, eating gluten can trigger an inflammatory response that will set you back. Focus on avoiding foods that will inflame your digestive system, and eating foods that will help to repair it.

Some people are deficient in lactase, which is responsible for the breakdown of lactose in dairy products. Without sufficient lactase, foods like milk can cause discomfort and irritate the intestinal membrane.

Pay particular attention to how you feel after eating the foods mentioned above.

## 12. Give Thanks for the Food

Giving thanks for your food isn't necessarily a just a religious habit, and it needn't involve prayer if you're not religious. It has benefits for those in the secular realm as well.

When giving thanks before a meal, your body prepares for digestion. The anticipation of food begins the first phase of digestion, causing the brain to instruct your body to begin producing stomach acid and digestive enzymes. Saliva will be released as well. Once food is swallowed, the stomach and intestinal digestive process begins.

The cephalic stage, or the brain's reaction to the anticipation of food, is similar to a key in the ignition of a car, communicating to the rest of the engine that it's time to get starting. Taking the time to think about your meal and give thanks for it provides a number of benefits that allow for better digestion.

## 13. Don't Overeat

One of the major causes of stress on your digestive system may be simply eating too much food. After eating a huge meal, your stomach and intestines just struggle to process that large amount of food. There aren't enough enzymes, bacteria, and stomach acid to do the job.

This can lead to gas, indigestion, bloating, and more. If foods remain undigested for too long, they can promote conditions like a bacterial or fungal overgrowth. Excess fermentation and gas in the intestines can lead to abdominal pain. You don't get the same nutritional benefits from food that isn't fully digested either.

Many medical professionals recommend eating several smaller meals instead of three big ones throughout the day. This is good advice!

## 14. Avoid Harsh Laxatives

Laxatives have a powerful effect on the digestive system, and when used properly can relieve you of constipation. But laxatives can cause digestive problems too.

The laxatives that you purchase at the store are for short-term use, and certainly not intended to be a part of your daily diet. Using excess amounts of commercial laxatives can lead to dehydration, mineral loss, and weakening of the colon. Furthermore, harsh laxatives move food through your system fast, cutting digestion time and possibly reducing the nutrients that you are getting from your food.

There are natural remedies that pose fewer risks and don't cause indigestion. Taking a few tablespoons of olive, castor, or coconut oil may ease the pressure in your intestines, allowing food to pass more easily. Drinking lots of water will prevent constipation, and a little senna tea will help if things do get backed up.

## 15. Avoid NSAIDS

NSAIDS are pain relievers such as aspirin and ibuprofen, as well as several prescription medications. Aspirin is often recommended for people at risk for strokes or heart attacks because it thins the blood, and arthritis sufferers take NSAIDS for their anti-inflammatory qualities. However, regular use can lead to serious issues in your digestive system, causing pain and indigestion.

The American College of Gastrology reported that up to 60% of arthritis patients who use NSAIDS regularly will suffer some of the side effects associated with regular use, such as ulcers, bleeding, heartburn, and holes in bodily tissues. There is a risk of heart problems associated with the use of naproxen. A report appearing in *Postgraduate Medicine* that 100,000 Americans per year are hospitalized as a result of the side effects of NSAIDS.

The reason why NSAIDS are so tough on the digestive system lies in the fact that they interfere with your stomach's ability to protect itself against its own acids by blocking an important enzyme. The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse

states that NSAIDS hinder the protective mechanisms of the stomach, allowing the digestive juices to damage sensitive stomach lining.

## 16. Eliminate Cold Foods And Drinks

Sensitivity to the warmth or coolness in our foods is highly individualistic, but it's worthy of discussion. Scientific testing has shown only that everyone reacts differently to water or food temperature, not that warm foods are better than cold foods.

For the most part, however, studies have suggested the best temperature at which to eat foods or drink liquids is about 98 degrees Fahrenheit, or equal to our own body temperature. At other temperatures, the body tends to delay emptying food from the stomach and gut, which causes some people who are sensitive to that to experience pain and indigestion.

Some experiments have shown that drinking cold water during a meal may cause fat to solidify and not digest properly. However, water is a critical element of digestion and the stomach actually secretes water during the digestion process. Water also washes down food out of the esophagus and breaks up food.

## 17. Maintain a Healthy Weight

The more excess weight you carry, the higher the likelihood that you'll suffer from some kind of heartburn or indigestion. In fact, a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine showed that a little weight gain, even if you're still within the healthy range, increases your likelihood of suffering from heartburn.

At the entrance to your stomach is a ring of muscle called the esophageal sphincter, which normally closes as soon as food passes through it. If it doesn't close all the way or if it opens too often, it can allow acids from your stomach to move into your esophagus, causing heartburn.

If you are thinking about losing weight for health reasons, consider losing weight to decrease your heartburn as just another benefit.

## 18. Limit Bad Fats And Increase Good Fats

You should consider cutting out junk or fried foods simply because they are more difficult for your body to digest. The harder something is to digest, the more likely you'll suffer indigestion, heartburn, constipation, or other digestive issues.

Bad fats include trans-fatty acids; hydrogenated fats, like margarine; and omega 6 oils such as corn, safflower and canola oils.

There are good fats, however, that the liver uses to produce bile, which aids in digestion rather than working against it. Examples like fish oils, olive oil, and grapeseed oil are good for us and can promote healthy digestion.

## 19. Don't Eat or Drink Before Going to Bed

Typically, your body needs three to four hours to digest your food before you go to bed. If you go to bed right after eating, there is a chance the food can back up into the esophagus or the food may simply be very slow to move through your digestive system. Both of these can cause discomfort.

If you know you're going to have to go to bed right after you eat, then eat a smaller meal made up of foods that are easy to digest. Avoid eating citrus fruit, tomatoes, spicy foods, red meat, high-fiber foods, whole grains, and fat-rich meals or desserts just before bedtime.

Also, try sleeping with your upper body at an incline. To do this, prop pillows under your upper body. This allows your digestive juices to flow downward instead of upward into the esophagus.

## 20. Eat at the Same Time Every Day

Although this has only been tested in studies on mice, eating at the same times each day is a logical way to reduce stress on your digestive system.

The study in mice indicates that our organs, perhaps, have a period of peak efficiency. Researcher Satchidananda Panda of the Salk Institute for Biological Studies suggests that our organs have periods in which they are more or less inactive.

In the experiment, one group of mice was allowed to eat as much as they wanted whenever they wanted. Another group ate all their food within one 8-hour period. Both ate the same number of calories, but one group gained weight and the other didn't. The mice that ate their calories within a restricted time window weighed 28% less than the other mice.

There is evidence that eating at regular times can help to prevent obesity, diabetes, and liver diseases, as well as reducing inflammation. Inflammation is a problem faced by many people, but an anti-inflammatory diet can help to fix that.

Other studies have found that people who eat at random times every day had higher blood pressure and BMIs than people who stuck to an eating schedule.

## 21. Eat Foods in the Right Order

Believe it or not, sometimes the order in which you eat your food affects the digestion of that food. Certain foods take less time to digest and other food more time. The theory is that you should eat things in the order in which they digest.

Fruits only take 20-30 minutes to digest and should be eaten first. Berries are the fastest, but harder fruits like apples or pears take a little more time. Then, eat vegetables, which take 30 to 40 minutes to digest. Cucumber, peppers and cooked veggies take less time to digest, while root vegetable take more time.

Grains, beans and lentils take about 90 to 120 minutes to digest. They digest more quickly if cooked, and more time if they are raw. Dairy takes about 90 to 120 minutes, with the exception of cheese, which takes a lot more time.

Meats generally take longer to digest. Eggs and fish take about 30 to 60 minutes, while chicken takes 90 to 120 minutes. However, heavier meats like beef, lamb and pork can take up to 5 hours to digest. Cheese, particularly those high in fats, can take up to 5 hours as well.

So, this means that, when you have a full meal before you, you eat fruits first, even if they are part of the desert. Then eat vegetables, starting with softer vegetables them moving on to root vegetables. Lastly, eat the meats.

## 22. Practice Mindful Eating

Although it doesn't seem like thinking about your food would cause you to have better digestion, it does. Being mindful helps you to slow down and give your body time to digest your food properly.

It's not uncommon to eat meals in front of a computer, the TV, while standing up, while driving, or while engaging in many other activities. When we eat meals while doing another activity, sometimes we don't even feel as if we've eaten. You may not even remember how the meal tasted!

When we eat too fast, or while under stress, digestive problems like indigestion and constipation become more common.

Mindful eating, on the other hand, involves treating eating as an activity by itself. To eat mindfully, first eat while sitting down at a table, or go outside and eat in a park. Honor the food with thanks - you don't have to be religious to do this. Simply take a moment to acknowledge the importance this food has in your ability to live. Chew each piece thoughtfully, thinking about its texture, flavor and how your stomach feels when it receives the food. Chew each bite thoroughly. Don't multi-task.

If possible, enjoy home-cooked meals. Making food from scratch helps us connect to it more and allows us to better appreciate it.

## 23. Get a Food Sensitivities Blood Test Done

Although the terms "food sensitivity" and "food allergy" seems interchangeable, they are actually very different things. Nearly a third of Americans think they have a food allergy, when in reality, only 4 to 5% of people actually do. Most people think that any adverse reaction to food means they have an allergy.

Food allergies are very specific, and cause the immune system to over-react, releasing histamine. The histamine can trigger symptoms that range from mild to severe, and can include hives, itching, wheezing and other symptoms that are more serious. Doctors can test for this by looking for IgE antibodies in your blood.

Food intolerances or sensitivities, on the other hand, just indicate foods that may not agree with you. Blood tests to determine sensitivity look for IgG antibodies. Some professionals argue that the tests aren't as valid as the one for food allergies because

they return a number of false positives, and people who have outgrown their intolerance might still show increased IgG readings.

However, a number of people give credit to these tests for helping them determine what causes pain and indigestion when eating. The test isn't always necessary though. Simply removing the suspect food from your diet, at least temporarily, might be a less costly alternative.

## **24. Start Each Meal with Something Bitter**

Bitter foods tend to get the salivary glands going, and help the stomach start secreting digestive juices. Appetizers may sometimes include something bitter to stimulate the appetite, and signal the digestive system that food is on its way.

Bitter foods such as dandelion greens, artichoke, beet leaves, or arugula are great ways to start a meal. Swedish bitters or apple cider vinegar can also start the process. The bitter herb hops is used in beer and elicits a similar reaction.

This works well if you've eaten too much or are having trouble digesting your meal. Consider keeping some Swedish bitters on hand for such occasions.

## **25. Increase intake of Magnesium**

A magnesium deficiency may not be the root cause of your digestive problems, but Magnesium can certainly help to resolve digestive issues. Magnesium helps to relax the muscle at the end of the esophagus, allowing food to go down more easily. Along with being a muscle relaxant it's also anti-inflammatory, helping rid the digestive tract of inflammation that may delay digestion. And it works as a gentle laxative too.

Most of us are deficient in Magnesium. Natural sources of magnesium include spinach, Swiss chard, quinoa, yogurt, pumpkin seeds, and almonds. It is also available in supplement form.



## Conclusion

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Hopefully a few of the ideas in this book resonate with you. You don't need to try them all at once — just choose one or two, and gradually start changing your eating habits.

A good probiotic supplement can help most people, and the advantages extend far beyond simply improving digestion. A healthy gut can boost immunity, increase nutrient absorption, raise energy levels, and much more.

It might be advisable to see a health professional before significantly changing your diet or supplement regimen. He or she will know if there may be potential drug interactions with the additions or subtractions of certain foods, for example.

If you ever see blood in your stool or develop a fever, please see your health professional immediately. He or she can determine if you need to go see a gastroenterologist. Let them know if you are taking any supplements or any dietary changes you've made so that he or she can determine the best treatment.

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