

10 Steps to Improved Digestion

The following steps are general recommendations to promote healthy digestion. A diet rich in whole foods, such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans and whole grains will provide the fiber and nutrients needed to keep your digestive tract healthy. If you are experiencing any digestive symptoms such as IBS, constipation, gas, bloating, diarrhea or small intestinal bacteria overgrowth (SIBO), you may want to go slow and introduce the recommendations slowly. Additionally, warm, cooked food may be easier to digest than cold or raw food. If symptoms persist or get worse, consult your dietitian or doctor for additional recommendations.

1. Eat Mindfully

The sight, smell, and thought of food increases the production of stomach acid, which improves digestion. When we eat on-the-go, while watching TV, or while distracted, we do not give our body time to prepare for the food we will eat. Try to calm and relax yourself before eating. Take a few moments to close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Sit at a table, eliminate distractions, and focus on food.

2. Eat Slowly & Chew Thoroughly

Eating quickly does not allow time for chewing and can lead to overeating. Slow down and appreciate the flavor and texture of your food. Try setting a minimum time limit for meals, experiment with eating with your opposite hand, use chopsticks instead of silverware, and put your utensil down between bites. Chewing food thoroughly is also important, as it helps to generate saliva, which moistens food and provides enzymes that begin the digestive process. Try to take small bites and chew each bite well before swallowing.

3. Sip on warm fluids

Drinking iced beverages with a meal, especially in large volume, could impair digestion. To help reduce gas and bloating, sip your fluids slowly and have something warm, such as an herbal tea. Ginger, chamomile, roasted dandelion root and rooibos are good options. Lemon juice and apple cider vinegar can also help to improve digestion by increasing the acidity of the stomach. Add 1 tablespoon of apple cider vinegar or squeeze half a lemon into 8 oz. of room temperature water and drink about 15-20 minutes prior to eating.

4. Physical Activity

Light physical activity, such as a 10 – 15 minute walk after eating, can enhance the movement of food through the digestive tract. Intense physical activity like running or aerobics can slow down digestion and may cause discomfort.

5. Have Something Bitter

Bitter flavors can enhance digestion by stimulating the release of stomach acid, digestive enzymes, and bile. Try adding chicory, dandelion, mustard greens, arugula, radicchio, or endive to your salad. Bitter roots such as dandelion or burdock can be added to stir-fries and soups, or even made into a tea. Bitter tinctures, such as Swedish Bitters, or citrus fruits can also be added to water before meals.

6. Spice it up!

Spices and herbs such as turmeric, ginger, fennel, cumin, mint, cayenne, cinnamon, and chamomile support digestion by, reducing gas and bloating, promoting release of digestive enzymes and stimulating contractions in the digestive tract. If you have heartburn, avoid mint.

7. Eat Your Enzymes

Enzymes are necessary for digestion. The body produces enzymes and eating enzymes from food sources can also be very helpful for digestion. Enzyme rich foods include raw honey, raw or fermented vegetables, and tropical fruits such as pineapple and papaya.

8. Soak Your Food

Soaking beans and grains before cooking can greatly increase digestibility by softening the fiber and unlocking nutrients and minerals. Soak them for a minimum of 30-40 minutes or, for best results, overnight in water with a splash of vinegar. Add a piece of kombu (seaweed that helps break down fiber) when cooking beans.

****These next two steps may need to be modified if you are experiencing digestive distress****

9. Eat More Fiber

Fiber is the indigestible part of plant foods that helps move food through the digestive tract. Soluble fiber can slow digestion to aid in nutrient absorption. Chia seeds, fruits, oats, beans, and sweet potatoes are high in soluble fiber. Insoluble fiber adds bulk and speeds up transit time through the intestines. Whole grains, seeds, nuts, and leafy greens are high in insoluble fiber. Both types of fiber are important for optimal digestion. Fiber rich foods are also a source of prebiotics, compounds that feed good bacteria in the gut. Add fiber slowly to prevent worsening digestive symptoms and make sure to get adequate fluid intake.

10. Support Your Gut Flora

Hundreds of species of bacteria live in the human gut weighing up to 3.5 pounds! Eating fermented or cultured foods (with live probiotic cultures) can help keep the digestive system healthy. These foods include kimchi, sauerkraut, kombucha, miso, cultured vegetables, pickles, yogurt, fermented/raw cheese, kefir, and tempeh. Find these foods in the refrigerated section of the grocery store to ensure they contain abundant, live cultures or enjoy making your own.

Foods to Stock Up On for Healthy Digestion

- ❖ Raw vinegar (such as apple cider vinegar)
- ❖ Lemon juice
- ❖ Fermented and cultured foods
- ❖ Bitter greens (dark green vegetables)
- ❖ Fennel, ginger and chamomile tea
- ❖ Digestive stimulating spices: ginger, turmeric, cumin, cayenne, and coriander

How to Include Them Every Day

- ❖ Add vinegar to salad dressings or splash on braised greens or roasted vegetables
- ❖ Sip lemon juice with warm water
- ❖ Use spices in cooked vegetables, beverages and soups
- ❖ Drink warm herbal teas
- ❖ Add a small serving of fermented or cultured foods to each meal

Dandelion Root Chai Tea

1 tablespoon dried dandelion root
2 cinnamon sticks, broken into pieces
5 to 6 cardamom pods, crushed
1 teaspoon whole cloves
1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
1-inch piece of fresh ginger, thinly sliced
4 cups filtered water
milk of your choice (lactose free, nut or seed milks)
raw honey

Place the dandelion root and spices into a 2-quart pot and cover with the water. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes. Strain into a quart jar using a fine mesh strainer. Pour into mugs, top off with milk of your choice, and sweeten to taste with raw honey.

****This tea has prebiotics, if you have digestive issues such as IBS, SIBO, bloating, or diarrhea, substitute roobios tea for dandelion, exchange honey for maple syrup, and use an alternative milk or lactose free milk****

Source: www.NourishingMeals.com

1. How Does Digestion Work and How Can I Improve Mine? The World's Healthiest Foods. www.whfoods.com. Accessed October 25th, 2019.
2. Healthy Eating for the Digestive System. Cleveland Clinic website. <http://my.clevelandclinic.org>. Accessed October 25th, 2019