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TIPS TO
IMPROVE
YOUR
DIGESTION



RADICAL HEALTH



Sometimes it is the simple things that make the biggest difference. Whether you suffer from heartburn, bloating or gas or even if you just do not feel right after you eat, these steps can work wonders. Do not dismiss them as too simple. You will be surprised and they also assist any other health work you may be doing, whether it is fixing your hormones, weight loss, or some other health condition!

1. **Determine whether you have a food sensitivity.** Identifying and addressing food sensitivities is one of the best things we can do to improve our gut health. It may mean removing specific food(s) for a period of time, but this is not necessarily permanent. With long-term work on the gut, you may be able to eat foods you enjoy without any digestive trouble.

When determining a sensitivity the key is to not make assumptions! Do not listen to common beliefs about specific foods (like gluten or dairy). We are all different and there is nothing worse than pulling out a food because it is a fad to do so which ultimately complicates your life and causes you more stress (which is bad for digestion and your gut).

Instead, go on an elimination diet for 2-3 weeks and slowly introduce foods. At the same time keep a food journal. Write down what you eat, the time you eat it and how you feel both physically and emotionally throughout the day. This can help pinpoint how and when you should eat and if any particular food may be bothering you.

2. **Stimulate your Digestive Fire!** Juice of half a lemon or one lime in 8oz or 250 ml of warm water with 1/2 teaspoon of fresh grated ginger. Lemons and limes are prebiotics and this is a great way to start the digestive systems off right. Consume first thing upon waking and about half a cup 15 minutes before eating to stimulate your stomach acid. Have acid reflux? You likely need more stomach acid (not less). Try this suggestion as well as the one below.
3. **Chew your food.** This is the number one reason for reflux and digestive upset. Chewing allows for more saliva to be mixed into your food. Saliva contains enzymes for digesting carbohydrates, beneficial bacteria and appetite-regulating hormones leptin and ghrelin. Chewing your food sends signals to the body to prepare it for the types of nutrients it is about to receive. 30-40 times will work wonders. One study found that chewing 40 times (as opposed to 15) helped participants lose weight. More importantly, it is key to starting the gastrointestinal process correctly. Try chewing more for your next few meals. You will be surprised how quickly you get used to it and it is just a matter of time for it to become second nature.



4. **Take time to savour your food.** Food is meant to be a pleasure and by enjoying our foods, we will benefit more from them while lowering our stress levels as we relax and eat. Take at least 20 minutes to eat. Longer if you can. Relax. Breathe. Your good gut bacteria need the time to sort out what is coming in and send the right signals to the right places. Enjoy.
5. **Do not drink with meals.** Too much liquid dilutes stomach acid and fills the stomach cavity with more volume, which can lead to reflux. It is similar to eating too much. If a stomach is too full, it does not matter whether it is from liquid or solid food. You can sip some liquid, such as wine, as it is a fermented beverage with enzymes and was designed to be sipped with meals. Water can be sipped as well, in small amounts.
6. **Hydrate.** Do drink plenty of water *between* meals. Water is needed for all your channels of elimination – skin, lungs, urine, and bowels. Dehydration is the main cause of constipation. Drink your weight divided by 16 to get the number of cups – i.e. 150 lbs ÷ 16 = 9.5 cups. Remember if you drink coffee, alcohol, smoke, and/or exercise, you need more!
7. **Eat plenty on anti-microbial herbs and spices.** These help squash bad bacteria without harming good bacteria. Many favourite culinary herbs and spices - cinnamon, clove, ginger, oregano, thyme, mint, basil – are anti-microbial. Incorporate as much as you can. A daily cup of chai tea is a great way to consume these cleansing herbs. Many of these herbs also contain volatile oils which stimulate the digestive system and help remove gas.
8. **Increase Fiber:** We've all heard it, but now is time to do it! Increase the amount and variety of fruits and vegetables into your diet. While probiotics receive more attention, key fibers are the workhorses of a healthy gut microbiome. Don't like many vegetables? Eat different varieties of the ones you do! For instance, try different types of apples, potatoes, kale, and cabbages.
9. **Avoid Processed and Sugary Foods:** It is hard to avoid processed food with our busy lifestyle and their convenience is tempting. While your taste buds might be saying yes, processed foods act as "fertilizer" for pathogenic microorganisms and yeast, causing them to rapidly multiply. This sets us up for common gastrointestinal problems, chronic inflammation, obesity, and other diseases.
10. **Don't Hold It In:** I know, pooping in public is embarrassing, but it is a necessity! Poop is a combination of waste material and bacteria, as a result of your body's digestive process. Holding in your poop causes water and nutrients to be reabsorbed and toxins to build up. While holding it in once in a while is fine, if done frequently it can result in all kinds of intestinal issues. Fact of the matter is: Everyone poops!



11. **Pay attention to your poop:** Now that you are pooping, pay attention to it! Bowel movements should occur at least once per day and ideally after each meal. It shouldn't take longer than a minute on the toilet to push out a poop. The colour, shape, and smell of your poop can tell you a lot about your digestion. Check out the [Bristol stool chart](#) and contact a qualified Nutritional Practitioner if it seems abnormal.

12. **Reduce Stress:** This is another one we've all heard before and are all bad at doing. Cortisol is a hormone produced by our adrenals gland when we are under stress. An excess of cortisol can deplete our good gut bacteria levels and increase the bad, in addition to contributing to several other health issues. Stress also impacts the signals sent from our brain to our colon via the vagus nerve. Try sipping on some relaxing herbal nerve teas (that also happens to be anti-microbial) such as chamomile, lemon balm, and lavender. Find a good meditation app on your phone and listen to it before bed.



- 13. Incorporate fermented foods:** Fermented foods are rich in probiotics, enzymes, and beneficial acids. Introduce fermented foods such as sauerkraut, kimchi, yogurt, and kefir. Eat them regularly, as many different types as you can. Fermented foods are key to long-term gut repair. Ensure you are eating true fermented foods - if your sauerkraut or kimchi is not in the refrigerator, then it does not contain probiotics. Shop local or better yet, make your own. While fermented foods are far superior, you can take a probiotic capsule if you are not able to eat them.

Reacting to fermented foods? Could be a histamine intolerance or SIBO. Best to contact a health care professional.

- 14. Incorporate bitter foods into your diet:** At dinner, start with a small salad of bitter greens such as dandelion, radicchio, arugula, chicory, or endive as they trigger enzyme release which can aid in the digestion of the meal to follow. Add vinegar, lemon or grapefruit juice to your bitter salad to aid digestion further by releasing stomach acid to help the breakdown of food. Can't bring yourself to eat bitter foods? Try an herbal bitters tincture 15 minutes before eating.

- 15. Improve Gut Circulation:** Getting proper blood flow to the gut helps improve nerve function resulting in better absorption and elimination. Yoga, dancing, trampolining, brisk walking, and just old jumping around are all good ways to get the blood moving to the gut. Deep breathing, meditation, and grounding also help. Finally, be sure to practice good posture throughout the day especially after eating.

