



“Specializing in digestive conditions, weight loss, food sensitivities, and emotional eating”

You Are What You Eat? Or, is it, You Are What You Absorb?

Think of your body as a finely tuned engine, and food as its fuel. If you are not completely digesting the foods you are eating and absorbing their nutrients, you're not adequately fuelling your body. The lack of adequate fuel, or the inability to use it properly, can lead to a variety of health problems. Poor digestion or imbalances in your intestinal flora ('good' and 'bad' bacteria) can result in many symptoms, from annoying digestive complaints such as chronic constipation, bloating or flatulence, to abdominal pain and irritable bowel syndrome. It has been stated that 70% of the American population suffers from malabsorption and digestive issues and at least 20% are suffering from food sensitivities; most go undiagnosed. If you avoid eating certain foods because they make you feel uncomfortable or feel that you have a “sensitive constitution,” and you have not addressed the situation, you may be doing long term damage to your digestive system and health. To get a better idea of how this can cause damage, let's look at the different levels of digestion and absorption and the nutrient interactions that occur along the way.

Once food travels to your stomach, you need adequate amounts of hydrochloric acid to break up dietary proteins. You may be among the millions of people who do not produce enough hydrochloric acid. This can cause vitamin and mineral deficiencies, osteoporosis, hardening of the arteries, arthritis, colon cancer, food allergies and autoimmune diseases.

Hydrochloric acid and other substances trigger your pancreas to release enzymes once food moves to the small intestine. Pancreatic enzymes play an important role in the digestion of proteins, fats and carbohydrates. An insufficient amount of pancreatic enzymes can contribute to many of the same problems as inadequate stomach acid.

Nutrients in your food are absorbed into your bloodstream from both the small and large intestine. Food that isn't digested completely will not be absorbed. Partially digested proteins can cause significant digestive irritation (such as colitis, gas or nervous stomach) and can lead to food allergies. Digestion of carbohydrates continues in the small intestine. Certain enzymes are released only by the intestinal microvilli and friendly bacteria, and damage to these can also inhibit digestion (as seen with chronically untreated wheat sensitivities, leading to Celiac Disease).

Many different microbes live in your intestinal tract, and it's normal to have billions of them. Ideally, you have "friendly" bacteria to aid with digestion, vitamin production, immune defense and recycle digestive enzymes. Unfortunately, many common activities can destroy the delicate balance of bacteria. Using antibiotics, steroids or the Pill or HRT, or a diet high in fat and sugar wreaks havoc on bacterial levels, leading to imbalances in bacteria and yeast, which can lead to illness.

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Chronic infection, food allergies or inadequate nutrition can result in poor immune deficiencies in your intestine. With lowered resistance, less friendly bacteria are able to colonize, and infection or allergies are more likely to develop. For proper digestive health, your body must carefully co-ordinate the breakdown, absorption and elimination of food. Bacteria must be in proper balance, and immune function must be adequate.

How healthy is your digestive system? Quick test: Add up the questions you say yes to below to see if the symptoms you experience indicate that you might not be digesting and/or absorbing your food properly.

- Do you often feel bloated
- Do you have an extreme feeling of fullness in your stomach, especially after eating?
- Do you often have gas?
- Do you have an irritable bowel, spastic colon, nervous stomach, loose stools or constipation?
- Do you avoid eating certain foods because they make you feel uncomfortable?
- Are you allergic to any foods?
- Have you had any of the following: asthma, allergies, high blood pressure, heart disease, history of strokes, arthritis, pernicious anemia, an autoimmune disease or yeast infection?
- Have you ever taken an antibiotic for more than one month at a time or have you taken antibiotics more than four times in your life?
- Have you ever taken oral contraceptives, HRT or steroids (cortisone, prednisone, etc.) for extended periods?
- Do you have abdominal cramps or pains?
- Do you get heartburn, indigestion or belch after meals?
- Have you had food poisoning and your bowels have not been 'right' since?

If you've answered yes to two or more of these questions then I highly suggest that you make an appointment with your nutritionist or naturopath to determine the best course of treatment. Combining a medical intake session with diet analysis and lab testing will offer a comprehensive look at the health of your gastrointestinal tract, with information about digestion, absorption, bacterial balance, yeast overgrowth, inflammation, metabolic activity, and immune function.

Rest assured that there are simple changes you can make to your diet and lifestyle that will have a profound effect on your long term health. Improving your digestion and absorption is the first step to improving your energy, enhancing your mood and reducing inflammation.

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