

Digestive Problems

Digestive problems can be uncomfortable and disruptive to our everyday lives. Poor diet, antibiotic overuse, and chronic stress cause the digestive system to malfunction in several ways. This in turn leads to a cascade of systemic reactions and contributes to everything from autoimmune disease to depression, obesity, and skin disease. Following the guidelines listed on this handout will promote healthy gut function and protect against these diseases.

Reduce or Avoid

Reduce your intake of (or avoid) the following substances:

PROCESSED FOODS

Processed foods, industrial seed oils, sugar, and refined flour all have a negative impact on gut health.

They unbalance the bacteria living in our gut, causing inflammation and intestinal permeability.

GLUTEN AND GRAINS

Many people with digestive problems are intolerant of gluten, one of the proteins found in wheat, and find relief from a gluten-free diet. Grains—even those that are gluten-free—can also cause digestive upset in some people, so your practitioner may recommend that you avoid them in addition to gluten.

INSOLUBLE FIBER

Insoluble fiber can be irritating to the digestive system in some people. If your practitioner recommends you avoid foods high in insoluble fiber, you'll want to limit your intake of the following foods. You can also peel, mince, blend, and ferment your vegetables to break down the insoluble fiber they contain and make them easier to digest.

- Greens (spinach, lettuce, kale, mesclun, collards, arugula, watercress, etc.)
- Whole peas, snow peas, snap peas, pea pods
- Green beans
- Kernel corn
- Bell peppers
- Eggplant
- Celery
- Onions, shallots, leeks, scallions, garlic
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower

ALCOHOL

Excessive alcohol consumption creates a pro-inflammatory environment in the gut. Limit your consumption to four to six drinks per week, or if your practitioner recommends it, completely remove it from your diet until your gut heals.

MEDICATIONS

Several medications—such as NSAIDs, aspirin, antibiotics, and (paradoxically) acid-suppressing drugs—have an adverse effect on your gut over the long term. While these drugs are sometimes necessary (and even life-saving), you should minimize your use of them when possible. Please speak with your doctor before making any changes to your medication regimen.

Increase

Increase your intake of the following substances:

BONE BROTH

Bone broth is rich in nutrients that have a soothing and healing effect on the gut. You can make bone broth at home by simmering bones in water with any vegetables you'd like for 24-plus hours. You can then use the broth to make soups, stews, or sauces, or even just drink it plain like tea! Aim for ½ to 1 cup of bone broth per day.

FERMENTED FOODS

The fermentation process makes foods more digestible, but it also produces healthy bacteria that are beneficial to the gut. Fermented foods include: sauerkraut (and any other fermented vegetables), beet kvass, kombucha, yogurt, kefir (water or dairy), kimchi, and more. Aim for one to two tablespoons at each meal, plus other fermented foods like kombucha or yogurt throughout the day.

SOLUBLE FIBER

Soluble fiber is soothing to the gut, so you should focus your vegetable intake on vegetables high in soluble fiber such as the following:

- Carrots
- Winter squash
- Summer squash (especially peeled)
- Starchy tubers (yams, sweet potatoes, white potatoes)
- Turnips
- Rutabagas
- Parsnips
- Beets
- Plantains
- Taro
- Yuca



It's also important to address your lifestyle, since stress and lack of sleep can also contribute to digestive problems. Daily meditation, deep breathing, or yoga, and getting seven to eight hours of sleep each night are essential.