

Digestion

by Margy Squires

Your Highway to Health



In a reader survey by TyH Publications, many of you were confused by the multitude of choices available to help you with or relieve symptoms of poor health and address your medical concerns. In one ear you hear that “nutrition is the key to unlock the door to your health”, while the other ear hears that all you’re buying with supplements is “expensive urine”. Readers wrote, “I take supplements and still don’t feel better” or “I have so many allergies and sensitivities; how can I get healthier if I can’t even take a vitamin?”

I’m sure you’ve heard this before and for good reason: it’s *absolutely* true. *You are only as healthy as your digestive tract.* A healthy gastrointestinal (GI) tract has the important job of extracting the nutrients from your food, as well as making some of the nutrients you need to survive. Disorders of the GI tract can set you up for food allergies, malabsorption and systemic inflammation, and put you at risk for the progression of age-related diseases. Did you know that excess cholesterol can be excreted to keep your levels normal? That your small intestines are the source of many B vitamins and responsible for mineral absorption? Or that yeast overgrowth can block nutrient transport into the bloodstream which starves your cells and organs? These are just a few examples! Now let’s take a little “trip” down the GI highway and find out how you can get your digestive tract back on the healthy tract.



Here’s a quick look at your digestive system from one end to the other, so to speak. Chewing your food begins the process. Saliva starts to break down food in your mouth and relay a message to your stomach to start producing hydrochloric acid and other digestive “juices”, including pancreatic enzymes to finish the job. From your stomach, what’s left moves on to the small intestines. Here’s where the good (nutrients), the bad (byproducts) and the ugly (toxins) get separated. The good goes into the bloodstream to replenish and rebuild the body. Byproducts and toxins exit at the end of the large intestines and are flushed away. *At any point where the digestive process does not function, you will have problems which ultimately affect your health.*

So let’s imagine that you have a delivery of food that is expected at your door at 10 a.m. sharp (a kind of Food Express service). The neighborhood health market has chosen the best: vine-ripened tomatoes, whole grain pasta, organic vegetables, and high acidophilus yogurt. The food is packed and the truck enters the onramp and starts down Highway 101.



A mile down the road, however, yesterday’s storm damage has eroded the surface of the road to slow the transit. A few miles later, the vehicle sputters and stops. The carburetor, which controls the amount of fuel into the engine, is cracked and leaking. A tow truck is called but meanwhile the food is stalled where it sits waiting for a ride. Truck number two gets five miles from your home and traffic congestion forces movement at a slow crawl. Much later, the food finally arrives at its destination. But the long transit time causes half of it to spoil. You’re famished and in fact, eat something that looks okay. Then, oh, no. Your stomach churns, you feel worse and suddenly elimination is not a problem as you head for the bathroom. Guess that was not so good for you after all.



Like the food truck trying to get your food to you efficiently and in pristine condition, your nutritional status and health depend on a perfectly functioning digestive system. How are you “rolling”? Check these five factors that influence your “health highway”.

Transit time (onramp, highway, and exit).

The time it takes for your food to enter and exit. Some health experts state you should have a bowel movement after each meal or at least once a day. Does the corn you ate on Sunday show up on Monday? (By the way this is a good test of transit time). Options: Chew food thoroughly at the starting “gate”. Keep going to do the diagnostic check on the rest of your highway.

Esophagus and stomach (the carburetor).

Digestion occurs via enzyme activity and hydrochloric acid. Feel bloated or nauseous after eating? Have gas or cramping? Options: Add plant enzymes through raw veggie and fruit

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intake or supplement with digestive enzyme therapy to help break down fats, sugars, carbs and protein. Many naturopathic doctors suggest a digestive supplement after age 40, when your own enzyme activity starts slowing down.



Mucosal lining (road surface). Protect against normal enzyme and hydrochloric acid action. Drugs, alcohol, fatty foods, caffeine and tobacco break down the lining. Do you have food “allergies”? Raw stomach pain on eating certain foods? Skip meals because it “hurts” to eat? What builds up the lining? Options: whole grains, leafy greens, brown rice, beans and legumes, and elimination of erosive foods. Supplements such as L-glutamine, mastic gum, Pepzin®, L-carnosine, slippery elm and peppermint oil help heal gut lining.

Bacterial flora (the breakdown lane). Normal intestinal flora provides the beneficial bacteria necessary to break down food. When good flora is low, yeast has room to grow. Do you crave sugar? (Yeast does.) Have skin or food allergies? Bloat after meals? Are either constipated or have diarrhea? Been on repeated courses of antibiotics? Take oral contraceptives? Options: Live acidophilus yogurt, L-acidophilus probiotics and prebiotics like fructooligosaccharides (FOS) all support healthy flora (good bacteria) growth.

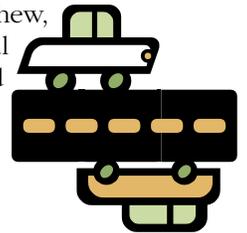


Elimination (off ramps & exits). What goes in must come out. Water is considered a natural laxative as the large intestine needs to “bundle” waste with water to keep it “rolling”. How often do you have a bowel movement? Options: Drink 8-10 glasses a day. Natural fiber foods (whole

grains, raw fruits & veggies) are necessary for the “bundle” as well. Try eating 3-4 soaked prunes at bedtime. Natural fiber supplements such as acacia, apple pectin, psyllium and ground flax can help. Adults should opt for a healthy 26 grams a fiber a day.

Summary

You may be eating all the right foods and supplements, but if you cannot deliver them where they need to go, you cannot reap their nutritional health benefits. What’s more, if your delivery truck is slow or stops in transit until the foods spoil, toxins can be “spilled” anywhere on the highway. Toxic overload can take a toll in achy muscles, allergic reactions, an increased risk of breast and colon cancers and degenerative diseases such as arthritis, heart and liver problems. If all your good intentions seem to be thwarted, check your truck (food sources), highway onramps (chew, chew, chew), surface roads (mucosal and stomach function), transit time, and exits (digestion and elimination). With a good diagnostic checkup, you’ll soon be finely tuned and rolling down that health highway again.



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Suggested Reading at the TyH Online Health Library:

- ◆ *Acidophilus Q & A (Probiotics)*
- ◆ *Acidophilus: Benefits Beyond the GI Tract*
- ◆ *Clear & Replenish: Healing the Gut*
- ◆ *Digestion 101*
- ◆ *Eat for Health with Digestive Enzymes*
- ◆ *Olive Leaf: Building your Health on Many Levels*

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