

THE DIGESTIVE SYSTEM

Involved in Many Health Issues

The Problem — Not Always Obvious

Everyone is familiar with some sort of digestive system disturbance—common occurrences such as constipation or diarrhea, nausea, dyspepsia (upset stomach or stomach ache), “heartburn”, and gas. There’s also plain old “indigestion”, when a meal doesn’t “go down” well. Occasional and brief episodes of any of the above are not a big deal.

However, many people suffer from frequent or continual gastro-intestinal (GI) disturbance of one kind or another. There may even be more serious disruptions present, such as an ulcer, colitis, or irritable bowel syndrome.

What may not be obvious is the connection between a GI disturbance and a variety of other health problems. Food allergy is a good example. Normally, the intestinal wall only absorbs small, simple molecules, the finished products of the digestive process. If the intestinal lining is inflamed, it may lose its ability to serve as a barrier against larger molecules which are incompletely broken down.

This excessive permeability has acquired the name “leaky gut syndrome”. When larger molecules are absorbed into the bloodstream, allergic reaction occurs. Food allergy may be an unrecognized contributor to headache, joint and muscle pain, and skin problems. It may also be an aggravating factor for respiratory allergies, such as sinus problems and asthma.

If liver function becomes disturbed, we may see hormone imbalances, intolerance for foods with fat content, or more headaches.

The Causes

Digestive enzymes are made in the mouth, stomach, and small intestine, but the pancreas produces the largest share. Pancreatic enzyme insufficiency often contributes to digestion problems.

Another cause is an imbalance between beneficial bacteria (acidophilus and its cousins), and the many types of harmful microbes present in the intestines. Normally the good guys successfully compete with the bad guys, keeping their numbers down. But when that situation changes, it may not return to balance without help.

Overgrowth of harmful yeast or bacteria in the intestines may drain the resources of the immune system. Infection may spill over to the bladder or vagina. Microbial toxins may impair the liver or other organs.

Medications may cause or aggravate a digestive problem. For instance, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAIDs) can seriously irritate the GI lining. Antibiotics kill off the beneficial bacteria, thereby allowing harmful microbes to multiply. And habitual anti-acid use neutralizes stomach acid, which is necessary for protein digestion and also helps to control harmful micro-organisms.

Natural Solutions—Depending on the Individual Case

- **Reduce harmful microbes—with specific herbal extracts.**
- **Replace beneficial bacteria—trickier than it seems, because few types escape destruction by the digestion process.**
- **Boost digestive power—with enzyme supplements, herbs, and even acupuncture. (Exercise helps too.)**
- **Repair the GI lining—with certain antioxidants and healing herbs**
- **Relieve liver congestion—with specific nutritional factors or herbs.**
- **Balance the diet—for the individual's needs of course. Eliminate foods to which one is allergic or intolerant. Is there enough protein, enough fiber? Too many sweets? Fats?**

Is There Hope? — YES, of Course There Is!

- **A 46 year-old woman with recurrent bladder pain. Reducing harmful intestinal yeast brought lasting relief.**
- **A 74 year-old woman with chronic asthmatic bronchitis. Although her digestion seemed OK, balancing the intestinal microbes reduced cough and wheezing by 90%.**
- **A woman with migraines. Treatment of the intestines and liver with several herbal/nutritional formulas was very successful in reducing frequency and intensity.**

Over the years we have helped many people, with many different problems, where the digestive system was a hidden cause.