

# 10 WAYS TO ASSIST THE DIGESTIVE PROCESS



WITH BONUS DIGESTIVE ELIXIR  
RECIPE

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# 10 ways to Assist the Digestive Process

For many of us, the process of digestion can be problematic, leading to unwanted symptoms and incomplete absorption of critical nutrients. This can be due to many factors such as ageing, stress, hurried eating, poor diets, medication, excessive alcohol or sugar, low digestive enzymes and stomach acid, bacterial or fungal overgrowth, or parasites. Symptoms can include gas, bloating, abdominal pain and discomfort, constipation, and diarrhea.

Failure to absorb all of our nutrients can lead to imbalances in the body and eventual disease.



## **1. Mastication (chewing)**

In my opinion, the digestive system starts with the eyes and the nose. Food needs to look and smell good in order to get our salivary amylase activated. Digestion actually begins in the mouth where these salivary enzymes, when combined with thorough chewing (mastication), starts breaking down our food. Eating slowly in a relaxed environment is beneficial, and thorough chewing is essential as the longer that food is exposed to salivary enzymes, the easier it is for the body to absorb all of the necessary nutrients.

## **2. Digestive Bitters**

We need adequate levels of stomach acid and digestive enzymes for further break down and absorption of our nutrients. We can do this by eating bitter foods such as dandelion greens, mizuna, kale, rocket, and watercress. Bitter greens stimulate digestive enzymes and bile flow, which promotes digestion. They support the liver in its' job of detoxification, act as a gentle diuretic, and may lower blood pressure and prevent anaemia.

Drinking 1 tablespoon lemon juice or 1 tablespoon raw apple cider vinegar in warm water 20 minutes before meals also stimulates the digestive process in this way. It is not advisable to drink lemon juice or cider vinegar in this way long term, as acidic liquids can erode tooth enamel. Consider drinking it through a straw to avoid direct contact with the teeth.

### **3. Pre-soaking**

Nuts, grains and legumes can all be difficult to digest, so it is beneficial to pre-soak and thoroughly rinse them in order to reduce and eliminate the phytates or phytic acid (anti-nutrients), lectins and enzyme inhibitors. Soaking and rinsing helps us to break down these difficult to digest proteins.

### **4. Increase Stomach Acid**

Many elderly people report difficulty when digesting meat, and this may be due to insufficient stomach acid, which is needed to break down protein. However, it is not only the elderly who can be low in gastric acid, in fact, it is quite commonplace, possibly as a result of stressful living and poor dietary factors. It is important for our protein to be broken down into amino acids (the building blocks of protein) in order to make our neurotransmitters, necessary for a healthy and balanced mood. Inadequate stomach acid may lead to nutrient malabsorption and resulting deficiencies, and also unpleasant digestive symptoms. Meat can be minced or slow cooked to ensure easier digestion.

Avoid eating on the run, or in a hurry. Take the time to appreciate what is on your plate. Eat your food slowly and chew each mouthful thoroughly, and try to eat in a relaxed environment. This means no electronic devices at the table. Avoid drinking large amounts of water or other liquids during meal times. It is preferable to drink your fluids between meals. Drinking raw apple cider vinegar and/or lemon juice in warm water stimulates stomach acid production.

## 5. Macronutrients

The composition of our plate is important too. Recent research indicates that we should be aiming for fewer carbohydrates, choosing complex carbohydrates and eliminating refined carbohydrates. We should be including more healthy fats and good quality protein sources, combined with a big serving of non-starchy vegetables. A very low carbohydrate diet was found to improve pain and stool symptoms for people with diarrhea predominant Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), improving their quality of life (1). Carbohydrate malabsorption (incomplete absorption) affects many people worldwide, with lactose intolerance being the most common, however, fructose and the sugar alcohol sorbitol, are rising in prevalence. Carbohydrate malabsorption can result in abdominal pain and cramps, flatulence, and diarrhea, similar to IBS symptoms. Reduction or avoidance of the malabsorbed sugar usually gives relief from symptoms (2). Hydrogen breath tests are specific and sensitive diagnostic tests that can confirm or eliminate the possibility of carbohydrate malabsorption (3).

## **6. Eat more fibre**

Eating an abundance of vegetables, and therefore a high fibre diet, feeds our healthy gut bacteria, otherwise known as the microbiome. The microbiome is a community of trillions of beneficial bacteria that reside in our digestive tract, enabling us to effectively absorb the nutrients from our food, resulting in increased energy production, healthy metabolism, and a healthy immune system. Eating 8–10 portions of vegetables and fruit (2 max) per day is recommended to ensure diversity. Whole grains, legumes or pulses, nuts, and seeds are also good sources of fibre, and may support healthy digestive function (4).

## **7. Probiotics**

Incorporating fermented foods high in probiotic bacteria is another way to increase the diversity of our gut bacteria or gut microbiota. Consuming foods and drinks such as sauerkraut, kimchi, yoghurt, tempeh, miso, kombucha and kefir is a great way to support the digestive system and keep healthy. Bifidobacteria and Lactobacilli are the strains most commonly studied, and are associated with reduced inflammation, and enhanced gut barrier function (5).

## **8. Prebiotics**

As 70% of the immune system is in our digestive tract, it makes sense to keep our gut healthy. Including prebiotic foods, which feed our gut bacteria, is also important. Prebiotics are non-digestible compounds and can be found in Jerusalem artichokes, asparagus, chicory, garlic, onion, leeks, green peas, and beetroot. They are thought to support our digestive health due to fermentation (6).

## **9. Peppermint**

Drinking peppermint tea has been used traditionally to settle upset stomachs, indigestion, or to reduce flatulence. Studies show that peppermint oil reduces digestive symptoms in patients with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (7).

## **10. Relax**

We all know how our digestion can be disrupted when we are stressed or upset. Managing our stress is vital to good digestion, and being in a relaxed state while eating may increase our stomach acid and digestive enzyme production, necessary to break down our macronutrients, and for absorption of micronutrients. High stress activates our sympathetic nervous system, which leads to our digestive system shutting down. Relaxation activates our parasympathetic nervous system, necessary for optimal digestion.

## References

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## **Digestive Elixir**

There are so many beneficial compounds in this elixir as it combines vitamin C, antioxidants, anti-inflammatory agents, antimicrobial, antibacterial, antiviral, and antifungal properties, to name a few. It also increases enzyme production in the stomach, allowing us to more efficiently digest and break down our food. More efficient digestion means less symptoms and better absorption of nutrients. The perfect start to the day!

3 lemons, juiced

Thumb-sized piece of ginger, grated

Thumb-sized piece of turmeric, grated (or 2 tsp powdered)

2 tbsp raw apple cider vinegar (with the mother)

Freshly ground black pepper (around 2 turns)

Blitz all the ingredients in a blender and pour into a bottle to store. Take 2 tbsp in a glass of warm water 20 minutes before breakfast. Keep the remaining juice refrigerated and use within 2 weeks.







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