

# CHECK UP & TUNE IN

## HOW DIGESTION AFFECTS YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE



Every day, we discover more and more about the power of digestion on your overall health. The digestive system changes the food that you eat into the energy and nutrients needed for your body to function efficiently. The health of every system, every organ, every cell and tissue depend on how well digestion is working. Poor gut health may make itself known through obvious symptoms like abdominal pain, gas, bloating, and unpredictable bowels, but it can also show up in the form of fatigue, joint pain, mood imbalance, and immune issues.



### Can all of these symptoms really be related to digestion?

The digestive system, once thought to be a simple system to convert food into usable nutrients, is actually connected to a wide range of processes in the body. Its intricate connection to the brain and the immune system links digestion to our physical and mental wellness. Studies show that the balance and diversity of gut bacteria may be the culprit behind those nagging daily symptoms that keep you from feeling your best.

**Feeling Sluggish?** Digestion is affected by stress, hormones, posture, lack of exercise, food sensitivities, and other imbalances. Poor digestion can lead to undigested food particles causing irritation as they make their way through the intestines. This can lead to gas, bloating, heartburn, and digestive disorders. The digestive system also ties up a lot of the body's energy, and when things go wrong, your digestive system has to work harder. As the capacity to fully digest food decreases, so can your energy levels.

**Moody?** It might be your second brain. What? There is a direct link between the gut and the brain through an intricate neural network called the gut-brain axis. In fact, the gut contains the same tissue and produces the same chemicals as your brain! Healthy gut bacteria are building blocks to the production of serotonin and dopamine, the neurotransmitters that determine our emotional state. If your gut bacteria are imbalanced, so are your moods!

**Too Many Sick Days?** Feeling like you catch every cold and flu around? The gastrointestinal immune cells are the largest population of immune cells in the body, making up between 70% and 80% of your immune system. Gut flora and immune cells work and communicate synergistically to defend against pathogens like viruses and bacteria. They strengthen the gut wall, regulate inflammation, and produce antibodies against invaders. Are you nurturing the right bacteria?

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### TIPS TO TUNE UP DIGESTION

#### 1. Feed Your Body, Not Just Your Stomach

You're driving home from work and feel the pang in your stomach. You make a quick stop at the drive-thru for a doughnut knowing that the carbohydrates will satisfy your hunger. Are you feeding your stomach or your body? Thinking about your health means making choices for the body as a whole, and not just its parts. Choosing to eat a doughnut at 4pm does fill your belly, but it can also cause your blood sugar to spike, your emotions to peak, and your energy to drop. Choosing fruits and vegetables, proteins, and good fats instead, will keep you satiated and provide prebiotics for good bacteria to flourish. This supports the digestive system and every organ system you need to feel great at the end of your workday.



#### 2. Be Mindful

You rush through meals so you can get the kids to soccer practice. You have lunch at your desk or during a stressful meeting. You eat dinner with one hand and respond to an email with the other. We've become a society that is so rushed, we often find ourselves eating without thinking! MindLESS eating can mean a loss of control around food choices and portion sizes, which leads to a burden on your digestion. Eating while rushed or stressed can reduce stomach acid and enzyme production, and lessen the energy diverted to the digestive process, which makes digestion less efficient. Mindful eating is more about how you eat than what you eat. It puts you in control of your eating habits and primes the digestive system to work at its best. Nature provides us with food offering tantalizing smells, flavours, and colours that we often ignore. Your digestive system will benefit from taking the time to relax and fully appreciate your food and the process of eating.



#### 3. Don't Overeat

Eating large amounts of food can leave you feeling uncomfortable, bloated, foggy-headed and exhausted! Your digestive system is operating like a hamster on a wheel, and boy is it tired! Overeating, especially of unhealthy foods, can lead to an overload of stress on your stomach and your intestines. It can upset blood glucose, and the extra calories, bad fats, additives, and preservatives can damage the digestive system and lead to other health disorders.



Sources: <https://experts.mcmaster.ca/display/publication1594655>  
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