

Healthy Gut, Healthy Life

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Heartburn, indigestion, bloating, constipation and IBS are common complaints. Many people simply live with digestive symptoms assuming there is little to be done or having been told: "that's just normal for you." What is normal can vary, and the occasional symptom may not be worrisome. But if you struggle daily with digestive issues or your symptoms worsen over time, it may be time to try something new. Below are some options you might not have considered.

Food sensitivities or allergies are a common cause of a variety of symptoms. Many people recognize that spicy food gives them heartburn or dairy causes gas. When you recognize these sensitivities, you can make choices to limit or avoid those foods. When symptoms are more subtle, it can be harder to identify problematic foods, and testing for food reactivity may be a good idea.

Next, consider the chemical process of

digestion. This starts with enzymes found in saliva and continues throughout the digestive tract with the addition of stomach acid, pancreatic enzymes, and bile. Having sufficient and balanced quantities of each of these is essential for healthy digestion and reducing symptoms. Direct supplementation of stomach acid, enzymes and bile substitutes is available and can be helpful in many cases. The use of bile or plant-derived emulsifiers is often recommended if the gallbladder has been removed. Targeted enzymes for specific problem foods (dairy, gluten, beans) can be helpful. And stomach acid can result in profound improvements for those that need it, but use caution as more is not always better.

For example, for patients using antacids, supplementation of stomach acid is contraindicated. This is a complex issue as having low stomach acid can actually be the cause of heartburn and other symptoms. But don't discontinue your antacid just yet - this may cause rebound symptoms, and changing

your prescription medications should always be under the guidance of a physician.

If you aren't using antacids, you can also support healthy stomach acid levels by using herbal digestive bitters, lemon juice or apple cider vinegar before meals. Other herbal treatments can soothe irritated gastrointestinal tissue, reduce gas and bloating and ease diarrhea and constipation. Herbal teas can be a nice way to treat digestive symptoms.

Mindful eating practices can also improve digestion and reduce symptoms. These include turning off electronics, avoiding distractions and other activities while eating, and having a calm eating environment. Acupuncture is another technique you may not have considered, but it can be very helpful.

Healthy digestion is about more than digestive symptoms. Our diet and digestion can impact our entire body. For example, inflammation in the gut can feed inflammation



in other parts of the body. There is a naturopathic adage to start with the gut in recognition of how important healthy digestion is to the health of the whole person. If you are struggling with digestive symptoms, consider an appointment with a naturopathic physician to help you get to the root of it.



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