



Digestive Health

First things first, when our gut health isn't in tip top shape it causes undue stress on our bodies.

We've already chatted about stress and its negative effects on our adrenals but the quick version and takeaway is, chronic stress wreaks havoc on our hormones and our overall health. This makes us more susceptible to the effects of aging and disease. Learning to manage it, is key to finding that balance!

Back to the gut. Not only does stress affect our adrenal glands it has serious implications on the health of our digestive systems. Stress, along with things like antibiotics, chemical and toxin exposure and deficiencies in our diets, can cause physiological dysfunction of the gut and disrupt the delicate balance of the "good or friendly" bacteria and the "not so good" bacteria in our intestinal tracts. These numerous bacteria make up something called the microbiome. We can think of the microbiome as an ecosystem that exists within us all, and the bacteria that reside within it are responsible for a whole host of tasks in keeping us healthy!

So as you can probably see, it's extremely important we have an ample population of good bacteria to balance out the not so good ones. This is essential in not only our general health, but in keeping our hormones in check, this is particularly true of our estrogen levels. Poor gut health will suppress those beneficial bacteria allowing the bad bacteria to create a toxic buildup of hormones. This can lead to excessive estrogen or estrogen dominance.

Essentially, an unhappy microbiome will lead us right down a “no fun” path of hormonal symptoms and imbalances, it can also increase the risk of estrogen driven cancers.

Digestive Health Action Steps

Now that we’ve covered the basics of why gut health is super important, let’s talk about a couple of ways we can work to support our digestive health with the foods we eat!

1. PROBIOTICS & FERMENTED FOODS

Your gut loves fermented foods, they’re loaded with probiotics, those live “good bacteria.” Try to include things like fermented vegetables, sauerkraut, kimchi and kombucha in your diet.

2. DITCH THE SUGAR & THE REFINED CARBOHYDRATES

Excessive sugar and refined carbohydrates (which quickly break down into sugar) spell gut health problems, big time. Refined carbohydrates (white breads, flours, pastas and rice) and refined sugars (table sugar, high fructose corn syrup and agave syrup) contain little to no fiber and are stripped of any nutritional value. These foods not only spike our blood sugar, but they also feed the “bad bacteria” in our guts and can lead to a condition called “leaky gut syndrome.”

Leaky gut occurs when the lining of our intestines become damaged or permeable. This means food, bacteria and other toxins can literally leak into our bloodstreams. Everything from nutrient deficiencies, autoimmune conditions, irritable bowel and inflammatory bowel disease and you guessed it, hormonal imbalances can result from a leaky gut. Remember, good bacteria feeds on fiber and bad bacteria feeds on sugar!

3. FABULOUS FIBER

We’re chatting gut and that means we have to discuss the bowels. Bottom line, you have to be regularly eliminating to ensure you are efficiently removing any excess estrogen in the body. Fiber means healthy bowels, so be sure to include whole grains like quinoa and buckwheat, lots of veggies and sources of soluble fiber (soluble fiber feeds those good bacteria) like fresh ground hemp and chia seeds, try adding them to your morning smoothie!

Your Guide to Healthy Digestion

1. Chew your food.

This is the number one reason for reflux and digestive upset. Chewing allows for more saliva to be mixed into your food. Saliva contains enzymes for digesting carbohydrates, beneficial bacteria and appetite-regulating hormones leptin and ghrelin. Chewing your food sends signals to the body to prepare it for the types of nutrients it is about to receive. 30-40 times will work wonders. One study found that chewing 40 times (as opposed to 15) helped participants lose weight

2. Take time to savour your food.

Food is meant to be a pleasure and by enjoying our foods, we will benefit more from them while lowering our stress levels as we relax and eat. Take at least 20 minutes to eat. Longer if you can. Relax. Breathe. Enjoy.

3. Eat smaller meals more often.

Eating smaller meals can also be helpful for keeping blood sugar balanced. Some people prefer three solid meals a day and others prefer five or six smaller meals. Avoid eating until you are over full, as this stresses the digestive system. Plan to eat until you are about 80 percent full, this satisfies the appetite, helps you meet your nutrient needs and does not put as much pressure on the digestive system.

4. Try food sequencing.

Eat vegetables first and the carbohydrates and protein last. Fruit should be consumed alone or can be eaten with the vegetables. This allows the vegetables and carbohydrates to move more quickly through the stomach to get to the small intestines where they will be digested. Meat and fish protein need to spend more time in the stomach. By eating these last, they can spend the time they need in the stomach alone which will aid digestion.

5. Consume salads or fermented foods with meals to aid digestion.

These contain enzyme and acids that can be helpful.

6. Do not drink excessively with meals.

Too much liquid dilutes stomach acid and fills the stomach cavity with more volume, which can lead to reflux. It is similar to eating too much. If your stomach is too full, it doesn't matter whether it's from liquid or solid food. Sip water in small volumes.

7. Try digestive enzymes and/or probiotic supplements.

Speak to your health practitioner about options. These can help improve digestion and absorption.

8. Determine whether you have food sensitivities.

These are not necessarily permanent and require a lot of gut health work to fix, but in the short-term, reducing a food sensitivity can temporarily improve digestion and intestinal issues. The key is to not make assumptions. Don't listen to common beliefs about specific foods. We are all different and there is nothing worse than pulling out a food because it is a fad to do so, ultimately complicating your life and causing you more stress (which is bad for digestion).

Keep a food journal. Write down what you eat, the time you eat it and how you feel both physically and emotionally throughout the day. This can help pinpoint how and when you should eat and if any particular food may be bothering you. Try this for 2 weeks, paying attention to how you feel on busy work days compared to relaxing days off. It can work to show you what role stress and possible food sensitivities are playing in your digestive health.