

DIGESTIVE HEALTH MATTERS

Why it matters and how to achieve it

When it comes to wellness, digestive health is important. And the good news is that, for most people, it's a matter of taking simple preventive steps. Taking control of your digestive health can help you improve your overall health, well-being and happiness. So don't wait until you experience problems. You can start making simple, proactive changes to your diet and lifestyle today that can benefit your digestive health, now and throughout your life. Here's how.



What is digestive health?

Digestive health is the ability to break down, absorb and use nutrients, and to eliminate waste products from foods and beverages in a way that optimizes your health and vitality. People with good digestive health don't regularly experience bothersome symptoms such as constipation, diarrhea and heartburn. Good digestive health is achieved by consuming a nutritious diet, minimizing emotional stress and being physically active.

Why is digestive health so important?

- Better digestive health equals better overall health. Your digestive tract is exposed to some 60 tons of food passing through it during a lifetime. The lining of the digestive tract is one of the body's first lines of defense against toxins and infections from harmful bacteria, viruses and parasites, so the digestive tract is an important part of your immune system.
- Quality of life—Digestive problems can affect all areas of your life. Symptoms of poor digestive health, such as heartburn/abdominal pain, diarrhea and constipation can be embarrassing, unpredictable and disruptive.

Simple Steps for Achieving Digestive Health

Diet

- *Eat your fruits and veggies.* Enjoy fruits and vegetables several times a day, including dried fruits, such as dried plums (prunes). They contain important vitamins and minerals and offer antioxidant power and fiber that provide health benefits, including strong digestive health.
- *Get plenty of fiber.* Fiber helps your digestive tract stay "regular," improves cardiovascular health and regulates blood sugar levels. Choose foods containing both soluble fiber, such as oat bran and dried beans, and insoluble fiber, such as whole grain products. Good sources of fiber include dried plums, bran, whole grain breads and cereals, beans and nuts.
- *Consume adequate protein,* especially vegetable protein, such as beans and soy products.
- *Get the vitamins and minerals you need.* Calcium and vitamin D are key to good digestive health and can be found in both dairy products and fortified foods. Check food labels.
- *Limit fats and sweets.* Instead, choose foods such as fruit and whole grains.
- *Stay hydrated.* Get enough fluids from beverages and foods you eat. Include a beverage with every meal or snack. Water, herbal tea and fruit juices, such as prune and plum juice, are all good choices.
- *Eat mindfully.* How you eat is just as important as what you eat. Eat slowly, enjoy the food as you eat it and stop eating when you feel full. Plan ahead. Pack good-for-you portable snacks, such as fresh or dried fruit, like dried plums, or granola and almonds.

Exercise

- *Keep moving.* Get at least 30 minutes a day, such as walking, aerobics or strength-building activities. Or try stretching exercises such as yoga or Pilates. Every little bit counts: Add movement to your day by using the stairs instead of the elevator or walking to visit a coworker rather than sending an e-mail.
- *Wait after eating.* Give yourself a chance to relax and digest your food before you exercise.
- *Strengthen your core.* Include exercises such as abdominal crunches on the floor, or use a stability ball to strengthen your core muscles.
- *Choose wisely.* If digestive issues are a problem, select digestive-friendly exercises, such as swimming, Pilates or strength training. These are easier on the digestive tract than higher-impact activities.

Stress reduction

- *Stay calm.* Manage your stress. Build time for deep breathing, meditation or visualization into your daily routine.
- *Pay attention to your body.* You'll be able to feel the positive effects of healthy lifestyle choices.
- *Relax.* Engage in activities that are relaxing to you.
- *Quiet.* Schedule some quiet time after meals.
- *Get adequate sleep.*

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For more information and tips for improving your digestive health, visit:
www.digestivehealthorg.com and www.tummywise.com.

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Myths & Facts

Myth: Dried Plums (prunes) cause diarrhea.

Fact: Research suggests that generally healthy adults can eat 10 to 12 California Dried Plums daily without significant changes in their bowel habits.¹ Keep in mind that individual digestion and bowel habits vary. If you do not regularly eat foods with fiber, you may want to add California Dried Plums—or any food with fiber—to your diet gradually. Start with 4 or 5 California Dried Plums (which are considered one serving) a day, and gradually increase your daily consumption.

Myth: Everyone should have one bowel movement a day.

Fact: When it comes to regularity, everyone's different. Although having one bowel movement daily is a good frequency for some, there are many healthy people who have several movements daily and some who have as few as one every 3 to 4 days. The goal is to be symptom-free—i.e., no pain, abdominal discomfort, bloating, constipation sensation or heartburn—and the key is to eat a diet optimal to your personal health needs. Bowel movement frequency is a reflection of that diet.

Myth: Fiber causes bloating.

Fact: Fiber can help keep you “regular.” It can bulk up the stool if it is “loose,” and can soften the stool to some degree. One common reason that some people experience bloating with fiber intake is that they introduce fiber into the diet too rapidly. Increase fiber gradually. In general, the more fiber you consume, the better your health—especially when you replace low-fiber, fatty foods with fiber-rich foods like fruits and vegetables.

Myth: Travel does not change bowel habits.

Fact: Many people find that when they travel, their digestive tract rebels, sometimes with irregular or more frequent bowel movements. Air travel can be dehydrating, and if one travels across time zones, the body's schedule is out of whack. So make sure you drink enough liquids when you travel. Also, take along items that help keep you regular such as California Dried Plums, bran cereal and ground flaxseed, and try to stay on your normal eating and sleeping schedule.

Myth: Dieting for weight loss improves regularity.

Fact: If you're overweight, losing weight is important for your health. However, one unfortunate side effect of weight loss, and especially rapid weight loss, is constipation. Consumption of low-calorie, fiber-rich foods is a prudent approach to preventing this. Physicians and dietitians sometimes recommend intake of dried plums, which can promote favorable bowel movement patterns in people trying to lose weight.

Myth: Eating at night will make you gain weight.

Fact: The big problem with night eating occurs when you have already met your daily calorie requirements but you continue to eat. Weight gain will occur because you're eating extra calories, not because those calories were eaten at night. Some people find that eating at night causes digestive discomfort, and it definitely should be avoided by those with heartburn. Otherwise, as long as the calories fit into the day, it is fine to incorporate an evening snack into one's eating plan.

Myth: Spicy food causes ulcers.

Fact: Some people with ulcers may notice that eating spicy foods can make them feel worse, but many people with ulcers tolerate spicy foods without problems. The most common causes of ulcers are infection with a bacteria called H. Pylori bacteria (such infections are treatable) and medication side effects, not hot sauce!

California Dried Plums and Digestive Health

California Dried Plums are beneficial to digestive health because they contain fiber (3g. of fiber per serving, made up of approximately 50% insoluble and 50% soluble fiber), as well as plant compounds called phenols and a sugar alcohol called sorbitol, all of which are thought to have a positive impact on the GI tract, and thus the entire body and immune system. Dried plums are also high in plant substances called polyphenols. Polyphenols are strong antioxidants that protect DNA against damage, decrease inflammation and prevent cancer.

¹ Tinker FL, Schneeman BO, Davis PA and Gallaher DD. Consumption of prunes as a source of dietary fiber in men with mild hypercholesterolemia. Am J Clin Nutr 1991;53:1259-65.