



ASHEVILLE INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

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Digestion, Absorption, and Elimination; Maintain all 3 for Optimal Health

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How can illness be related to gut health when the stomach feels just fine? Because digestion has multiple phases, but poor function in any phase can contribute to many illnesses, including allergies, autism, autoimmune disease, and chronic fatigue syndrome.

The first phase of digestion takes place in the mouth and the second phase is in the stomach, which alerts us with pain, bloating or gas when something is wrong. This is where food is mainly broken down. The third phase takes place in the small intestines, which don't always have a direct way to tell us there's a problem. Here food is further digested and then absorbed into the body. The fourth phase (elimination of waste and toxins) takes place in the colon.

If food is properly processed in the mouth and stomach, the intestines will receive partially-digested food that it further breaks down using enzymes and beneficial bacteria. These enzymes can be low from poor eating habits or chronic illness. Temporary replacement with plant enzymes is often warranted.

Beneficial bacteria can also be out of balance due to antibiotic use, heavy metal toxicity, steroid prescriptions, birth control pills or an unfriendly gut environment. This imbalance can range from a simple lack of normal bacteria to an invasion of infectious species (including parasites and yeast). Reestablishing a healthy bacterial population is essential to getting the intestines back in order, like spreading grass seed on a lawn to crowd out weeds.

The intestines have a lining to act as a barrier. When inflammation disrupts this barrier, unbroken down food can pass through and enter the body ("leaky gut"). The immune system responds to these large food particles as invaders. This signals other immune factors, resulting in a heightened immune response, which can lead to allergies, autoimmune disease or arthritic-type pain. Gut wall inflammation can also decrease the ability to absorb food properly, leading to low body nutrients. Thus, healing the lining is the place to begin gut rehabilitation.

Common Irritants/Causes of Inflammation:

Food Allergies	Preservatives	Food Dyes
MSG	Aspartame	Steroids and Hormones in Meats
Coffee	Cigarette smoke	Pesticides
Salon Products	Building Materials	

Soluble and insoluble fiber can help by absorbing toxins, waste products, and excess hormones and fats and carry them out the back door as they go. Fiber also builds bulk which stimulates the gut to contract and empty, improving both constipation and diarrhea. They also Fiber is also the primary food source for normal bacteria in the gut.

Resting the gut, with a short-term allergy free diet, is critical for healing acute inflammation. A long-term method of avoiding inflammation is to rotate irritating foods out of the diet for 3-4 day periods. An individual should ideally identify which foods they are personally sensitive to, but a good starting point is the “Dirty Dozen” or top 12 food allergens.

The “Dirty Dozen”

Wheat	Egg	Corn	Peanuts
Cow’s milk	Soy	Chocolate	Shellfish
Nightshade Vegetables	Oranges	Tree Nuts	Alcohol

The intestines are the first line of immune defense, disabling invaders before they can get into the body, as well as our pathway to assimilate what we need to survive. When the proper function of the gut has been challenged, the effects can initially be subtle, but over time become profound. They say we are what we eat, but more truly, we are what we absorb.