

Integrative Approaches to Improving Digestion

Ellen Vora, MD

*Adapted from **The Paleo Cure** by Chris Kresser*

- 70 million Americans suffer from digestive issues.
- Poor digestive health increases our susceptibility to mood disorders, obesity, skin conditions, autoimmune disease, and other health conditions.
- Consider making changes to heal your gut if you experience:
 - o *IBS, gastrointestinal symptoms, heartburn, chronic diarrhea or constipation, bloating, distension, gas, belching, acne, eczema, migraine, asthma, significant seasonal allergies, joint pain, "brain fog", chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia or autoimmune illness (thyroid disease, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, celiac disease, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, lupus, Raynaud's phenomenon, rosacea, Type I diabetes, etc.).*

How to Heal the Gut:

1. Avoid Foods that Harm the Gut

- o Flour
- o Sugar
- o Industrial Vegetable Oils (e.g., canola oil, corn oil, soybean oil)
- These foods can change the gut flora, cause inflammation and compromise the integrity of the gut lining.
- Other foods & beverages that can negatively affect gut health include:
 - o Alcohol
 - o Gluten
 - o Processed Soy
 - o GMO Foods
 - o Dairy, for those who don't tolerate it (full-fat, fermented non-cow dairy tends to be tolerated best)
- Generally eating real food and avoiding processed food is a great way to promote gut health.
- Consider a 2-month elimination diet, monitoring your symptoms during the elimination phase and after re-introducing the eliminated food.
 - o Note: you may experience "detox" symptoms for the first 1-2 weeks

2. Reduce Foods that Irritate an Inflamed Gut

- If your gut is inflamed, you may benefit from reducing certain foods that can irritate your gut, even if they are otherwise healthy foods.
- Non-starchy vegetables, such as broccoli and greens, can irritate an inflamed gut. This is because they're high in insoluble fiber.
- The vegetables highest in insoluble fiber include:
 - o Greens, peas, green beans, corn, bell peppers, eggplant, celery, onions, shallots, leeks, scallion, garlic, cabbage, bok choy, brussels sprouts, broccoli and cauliflower.
- You can make these foods less irritating to the gut in the following ways:
 - o Cook your vegetables
 - o Remove the stems, dice, mash, chop, grate or blend the veggies and chew thoroughly
 - o Consume these vegetables in a fermented state (e.g., sauerkraut, kimchi)

- FODMAPs (Fermentable Oligosaccharides, Disaccharides, Monosaccharides and Polyols), are another category of food that can be difficult to digest and therefore exacerbate digestive disturbances.
- Common FODMAPs in the diet are:
 - o Wheat, rye, barley, onion, garlic, artichoke, asparagus, beets, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, fennel, chocolate, prebiotics (FOS, inulin), pulses, beans, stone fruits, apples, apricots, avocados, blackberries, cherries, nectarines, peaches, pears, plums, prunes, watermelon, cauliflower, mushrooms, and artificial sweeteners (isomalt, maltitol, mannitol, sorbitol, xylitol).
- Note: high-insoluble fiber veggies and several FODMAPs are otherwise healthy foods that are difficult to digest *by an already inflamed gut*. Once your gut has healed you can experiment with increasing your consumption of healthy FODMAPs and raw veggies.

3. **Eat Foods that Soothe, Nourish and Heal the Gut**

- **Eat Fermented Foods At Least Twice a Day**
 - o Fermented foods provide beneficial bacteria for the gut.
 - o Try: raw, unpasteurized sauerkraut, kimchi, beet kvaas, kefir & yogurt (if you tolerate dairy), and kombucha.
 - o I recommend Hawthorne Valley Sauerkraut Juice and Beet Kvaas as a convenient fermented food.
 - o While cheese and alcohol are indeed fermented, they're unfortunately not therapeutic for the gut.
- **Consume Bone Broth Daily**
 - o Rich in glycine and gelatin, bone broth helps restore the integrity of a damaged gut barrier.
 - o Consume it daily. Make your own or purchase it here:
 - www.grasslandbeef.com
 - o Read about the benefits of bone broth here:
 - www.westonaprice.org/food-features/broth-is-beautiful
- **Consume Plenty of Soluble Fiber & Resistant Starch**
 - o Soluble fiber promotes the survival of beneficial gut flora and can have a soothing effect on the gut.
 - o Starches such as sweet potatoes, white potatoes, plantain, taro and yuca are particularly good sources.
 - o Resistant starch is another option to explore:
 - Recommendation: Bob's Red Mill Potato Starch (mixed with water)

4. **Avoid Medications that Compromise Gut Health, Especially Antibiotics**

- Under the care of a physician, consider reducing or eliminating medications that compromise gut health:
 - o Antibiotics (unless absolutely necessary)
 - o NSAIDs, Aspirin, Ibuprofen
 - o Antacids, Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPI's)
 - o Hormonal Contraception
 - o Steroids

5. **Treat Gut Infections**

- If you suspect you have a parasite or other gut infection (symptoms could include diarrhea, distension, fatigue), see a naturopath or functional medicine doctor to have it evaluated and treated.

6. Manage Stress

- Chronic stress harms gut health in multiple ways—it can cause gut inflammation, intestinal permeability and the overgrowth of bad bacteria in the small intestine.
- Gut function has been shown to improve with mindfulness-based stress reduction and other techniques.
- Incorporate any form of *daily* stress management:
 - o Yoga (try www.yogaglo.com or www.yogavibes.com)
 - o Breathing exercises (inhale for 4 counts, hold for 2, exhale for 4)
 - o Meditation
 - o Journaling
 - o Gratitude practice
 - o Acupuncture
 - o Being in nature
 - o Apps: Headspace, Buddhify, Zencast, BreathingZone, Equanimity, Breathe2Relax

7. Supplementation

Note: supplements do not take the place of a food-based approach to managing gut health, but they can be a helpful addition.

- **Take a Probiotic Daily**
 - o I recommend *Prescript Assist* because it's non-allergenic (no dairy/soy), soil-based and contains beneficial *pre*biotics.
- **Additional Supplements to Consider**
 - o Fish Oil (*Green Pastures Blue Ice Royal Butter Oil Fermented Cod Liver Oil Gel - Cinnamon Tingle*)
 - o Gelatin (*Great Lakes Gelatin, Collagen Hydrolysate*)
 - o *GI Revive* by *Designs for Health*
 - o Glutamine (*Source Naturals* or *Metagenics Ultra InflammX*)
 - o Zinc (*Source Naturals* or *Thorne Research*)
 - o Turmeric (*Source Naturals*)
 - o Magnesium (*Pure Encapsulations Magnesium Glycinate 200-400mg* at bedtime)
 - o I do not recommend fiber supplementation—just eat plenty of plant foods and stay hydrated
 - o If you want to ease digestion, you can take digestive enzymes for a brief period of time (*Enzymedica Digest Gold*)

8. Get a Squatty Potty or Nature's Platform

- Squatting (rather than sitting) promotes complete evacuation without straining.
- This helps alleviate constipation, diarrhea, hemorrhoids, diverticulosis and IBS.
 - o www.squattypotty.com or www.naturesplatform.com