



## ***The Drug-Free Path to Healthy Digestion:***

Natural solutions for indigestion, heartburn and more

By Isaac Eliaz, M.D., M.S., L.Ac.

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The simple act of nourishing your body should *never* be a painful experience... if anything, eating good food should be something you *look forward* to.

But if you're reading this report, my guess is that this simple pleasure has turned into a nightmare somewhere along the way. And if so, you're not alone. Searing heartburn, embarrassing gas, irritable bowels... all of these concerns are more common today than ever. And permanent relief is that much harder to find.

As an integrative doctor, I know how essential strong, healthy digestion is—not just to the quality of your life, but also to the vitality of your health. And that's exactly why I wrote this report.

There are no shortcuts when it comes to putting your digestive system back on the right track—but there are *real* solutions. They're natural, comprehensive...and they will allow you to start living your life again, favorite foods and all.

In the following pages, I'll share all of these solutions with you—from helpful diet and detox regimens, to critical supplements that can make a major difference in both the short *and* long term. But first, let me take a brief moment to go through some of the basic processes that keep your digestive system working—and a few of the pitfalls that could be dragging it down.

## **The Anatomy of Trouble-Free Digestion**

Your digestive tract is essentially a hollow tube that begins at your mouth and leads all the way down to your rectum—including your esophagus, stomach, small intestine, and large intestine (also known as your colon).

Along this tract you will find a lining called the mucosa—which contains small glands responsible for producing digestive enzymes and gastric acid—as well as smooth muscle, responsible for both breaking down your food and pushing it along on its way (a wave-like movement called peristalsis). Other key components of your digestive system include your pancreas and your liver, both of which are responsible for producing critical digestive juices that reach your intestines through small connecting tubes, or ducts. (Your gall bladder also plays a role, storing these juices for later use.)

Digestion actually begins in the mind, with anticipation of eating, and with the information coming through your nervous system from your senses. Smelling the fragrant scents of food and spices, seeing the colors and textures of the food—this sensory and mental stimulation causes your nervous system to send signals to all parts of your digestive system to gear up for the job of digestion.

The moment food enters your mouth, the enzymes in your saliva start the digestive process. Your saliva contains essential enzymes that begin to digest starches and sugar into smaller molecules, which are broken down further with the help of

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pancreatic juices and enzymes from the small intestine. Once they have been broken down into glucose, these starches can be distributed into your bloodstream to be used as energy.

Digestion of protein, on the other hand, does not begin until it reaches your stomach—and once in your small intestine, several enzymes will complete the process of transforming these protein molecules into amino acids. Once absorbed through the intestinal wall into your bloodstream, these amino acids play a key role in building and repairing body tissue, be it muscle or cell walls.

Fats take the longest time to digest—meaning they'll stay in your stomach the longest, as well. Bile acid from the liver will break these molecules into fatty acids and cholesterol, which go on to play a vital role in cell membrane structure and energy production.

Finally, while simple carbohydrates are by far the easiest to digest—requiring less time and energy than proteins and fats—fiber-rich complex carbohydrates are another story entirely. That's because fiber is not digestible *at all*, moving through the digestive tract either partially or completely intact. Of course, that's *exactly* what makes it such a vital part of your diet, as I'll explain later on in this report.

For now, however, I'd like to talk a little bit more about just how important your digestive system really is to your overall health. (Hint: It does *a lot* more than you might think!)

## **Good Digestion and Immunity Go Hand and Hand**

By far the best known function of a healthy digestive system is, of course, to nourish and feed your body. As illustrated above, proper digestion must be taking place (by way of enzyme secretion in your small intestine) in order for your body to absorb essential components like vitamins, nutrients, and amino acids from your food. Without it, you simply *won't* be getting the vital elements you need to live—let alone to live healthfully.

This strong relationship between digestion and overall health is emphasized as one of the central schools of thought in Traditional Chinese Medicine—the Spleen/Stomach school, or in simpler terms, the digestive school. This practice looks at health and disease as a reflection of the balance and health of the digestive system.

For example, we now know that the digestive system is indeed much more than just digestion. Important functional and regulatory aspects of the endocrine/hormonal system and the immune system (as well as others) take place in the digestive system. In fact, your gut is in many ways the seat of your immune defenses. Both the naturally acidic environment of your stomach and immune-cell-rich mucosal lining of the digestive tract combine to form a strong barrier against a variety of food-borne bacteria.

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Your intestines also play host to hundreds of different natural microorganisms, including germs against which your body produces antibodies. The result is secretory IgA, a crucial immune substance that resides in your saliva, tears, and other mucous membranes, where it acts as your first line of defense against invading pathogens—including colds and the flu.

Think of it this way, and you see that the digestive system—with all of its many mechanisms—really is the hub of your immunity.

## **Digestion from A Traditional Chinese Medicine Perspective**

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, digestive problems are a result of “digestive weakness”—a condition that can be inherent as part of our constitution, but more often acquired as part of our lifestyle and dietary habits. The weakness is seen as reduced digestive “heat.” In Western terms, this heat can be understood as pertaining to essential enzymatic and secretory activity—meaning that, in a “cold” digestive environment, basic digestive functions crawl to a stop.

So how does this happen?

Typically, “coldness” is actually the result of “overheating” and subsequent “burnout.” Too much work, not enough sleep, too rich food, eating too fast, too much stimulation and stress... all of these factors can cause your digestive system to “heat up” to the point of exhaustion. The result, in medical terms, would be decreased digestive enzymes, and a drop in Hydrochloric acid (HCL, better known as stomach acid) production.

Reduced HCL and digestive enzymes present with several classic symptoms—many of which might be familiar to you: Bloating and fatigue after a meal is one, as well as diarrhea or constipation and flatulence. (“Hot” digestion, on the other hand, usually comes with sharp abdominal pains, constipation, and thirst.) It’s also worth noting that these digestive changes tend to happen naturally over the years, which means your need for comprehensive digestive support is likely to increase with age.

## **Why Typical Antacids *Just Don’t Work***

Ultimately, chronic digestive problems can weaken your intestinal lining over time—meaning that, aside from being unable to produce necessary digestive secretions such as bile and enzymes, rogue food particles can escape into your bloodstream before they have been adequately broken down. This syndrome is referred to as “leaky gut”—and its consequences can include anything from abdominal pain, heartburn, and bloating, to anxiety, sleep problems, and allergic reactions.

Finally, as gastric acid production decreases, your body is far less able to absorb critical minerals and vitamins from your food... resulting in any number of serious

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consequences for your health. This condition, called hypochlorhydria, affects roughly 30 percent of older adults. This can result in an increased risk of anemia and also contribute to bone loss.

Introduce frequent antacid use into the mix, and this threat is compounded. An increasing number of studies have demonstrated that acid blockers—among them, the popular H<sub>2</sub>-receptor antagonist cimetidine—can contribute to anemia with extended use, potentially inhibiting your dietary iron absorption by as much as 52 percent.

And iron isn't the only nutrient that's depleted as a result of low stomach acid. Inadequate protein digestion can also significantly impact your absorption of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, leading to a condition called pernicious anemia. Additionally, the reduced absorption of calcium and magnesium deprive your bones of the minerals they need to maintain their strength and density—thus contributing to osteoporosis.

In the end, the temporary relief you find with these drugs is usually counterproductive over the long run. The fact remains that most cases of acid reflux stem from inadequate digestion in the first place—undigested food becomes trapped in the stomach for a longer period than normal, producing an uprising of heat, along with that trademark burning sensation.

It may sound strange, but what you *really* need is a greater production of HCL—that is, more “heat,” *not* less. The bottom line: These “band-aid” solutions may work at first, but the problem almost always comes back with a vengeance.

For *any* health concern, the focus should be on healing... *not* concealing. And that's where an integrative approach (involving diet, lifestyle, supplements, and detoxification) will always serve you best. So what can you do to ensure that your digestive system is functioning properly—and more importantly, that it *stays* that way?

To begin, you'll want to take a closer look at what you eat.

## **Eating and Drinking Your Way To Better Health**

As I've explained, any conditions that might “cool down” the digestive system can contribute significantly to the problem of sluggish and impaired digestion. And some of the most common causes of this type of cooling include excessive eating, late meals, rushed eating, and stress—all of which are commonplace in your typical hurried Western lifestyle.

Simply taking the time to slow down and mindfully eat your meals (as hard as it can be when you're busy) could make a big difference in keeping your digestive system healthy. But you should also be mindful of what's on your plate. The food that you

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eat is responsible for telling your digestive system what to do—and if it's not receiving proper direction in the way of natural whole foods, it's not going to function correctly. As such, a fiber-rich, organic, nutritious and balanced diet can go a long way in helping you to achieve this goal—and in this case, the “fiber-rich” aspect is particularly important.

There are two types of fiber. Let's start with the insoluble kind: Your digestive enzymes won't break down this type of fiber—so its primary benefit is as a bulking agent, facilitating bowel movements and controlling the pH of your colon. Soluble fiber, on the other hand, binds with water and fat to form a gel-like consistency. This also helps to maintain your colon's pH—but it also helps to lower cholesterol *and* stabilize blood sugar by prolonging the time it takes for your body to absorb glucose.

In the end, it's easy to see how both play critical roles in lasting digestive health. Great sources of insoluble fiber include whole-wheat products, leafy green vegetables, fruit skins and root vegetable skins, corn, bran, and a variety of seeds and nuts. Soluble fiber can be found in foods such as oat bran, beans, barley, flax seed, and psyllium husk.

One thing you'll also want to be on the lookout for—especially with respect to your digestive system—are potential food allergies and intolerances. Milk (which contains the sugar lactose, and the protein casein) is a sore spot for many. And allergy to wheat gluten (as in Celiac disease) is a major contributing factor to many cases of irritable bowel syndrome and its related symptoms.

With that said, even the healthiest foods can become a problem for you, depending on your body—and the only way to know for certain is to take a food allergy test, or begin eliminating foods from your diet one by one to identify the source.

Finally, none of these measures will get you far without plenty of fresh, clean water—your body needs ample amounts of fluid to form the saliva and gastric and intestinal secretions that are crucial to digestion. (Just don't put your water on ice—beverages that are too cold will further reduce the “heat” you want to restore. Warm beverages such as herbal tea or hot water with lemon are best.)

## **Combine Critical Supplements for a *Lasting* Solution**

Supplements are especially important for digestive health, as they are often used to replace components of our digestion that are no longer functioning. Probiotics and prebiotics are two of the most important supplements you can take to help restore healthy digestion. Probiotics provide live strains of friendly flora to balance the bad bacteria in your gut—bacteria which, if unchecked, can contribute to chronic diarrhea, flatulence, or constipation. Prebiotics, on the other hand, will ensure that your friendly florae are provided with the proper environment in which they can thrive.

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That said, herbal support is probably the most helpful for restoring optimal digestive strength. In my clinic, I like to use an integrative digestive tonic based on ancient Eastern digestive herbal formulas. It combines herbs, digestive enzymes, medicinal mushrooms, and minerals as well as other components. But the truly unique feature of this formula is that it addresses the root causes of weak digestion, while simultaneously addressing common issues that result from such weakness as I discussed above.

This formula contains several herbal combinations that work in synergy with one another, each built upon on a classical Tibetan herbal formula as a foundation. Each of these ingredients has a long history of safe and effective use:

- **Pomegranate Seed** (*Punica granatum*) strengthens bile flow and gastric secretions.
- **Lesser galangal** (*Alpina officinarum*) facilitates digestion and relieves gas.
- **Black pepper** (*Piper nigrum*) helps neutralize excess stomach acid.
- **Cardamom fruit** (*Elettaria cardomomum*) strengthens bile flow and gastric secretions, while improving renal energy and warming the stomach
- **Cassia bark** (*cinnamomum aromaticum*) fights gas and flatulence, stimulates the appetite, and reduces diarrhea.

In addition to these fundamental ingredients, Traditional Chinese Medicine offers several herbs that can expand upon the “heating” herbs listed above—all of which, in combination, will help to regulate and smooth digestion, by moving digestive energy downward. As a result, you’ll see a direct effect on acid reflux and heartburn, indigestion, flatulence, *and* food stagnation.

To help process food in the upper digestive tract, you have **Fresh ginger** (*Zingiber officinale*), which prevents both nausea and flatulence, and **Sacred lotus** (*Nelumbo nucifera*), which helps to clear heat, alleviate food stagnation, and aid in nutrient absorption. To prevent acid reflux, warming herbs that help move digestive energy downward, provide wetness to digestion, and decrease phlegm are ideal. These include **Deglycrrhizinated licorice** (DGL), **Henon bamboo** (*Phyllostachys nigra*), and **Tangerine peel** (*Citrus reticulata*).

Mineral support is also critical—for example, **zinc** is essential for enzymatic processes, while **chromium** alleviates sugar cravings. Both also help to decrease inflammation—a major concern in any type of irritable bowel syndrome.

Finally, low doses of digestive enzymes—including **alpha-galactosidase**, **protease**, **amylase**, **lipase**, **phytase**, and **invertase**—will help to assist stomach enzymes in the digestion process. And of course, a targeted selection of medicinal mushrooms provides critical immune *and* digestive support. My main choices are:

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- **Poria** (*Wolfporia cocos*) to support the liver in the digestion process.
- **Maitake** (*Grifola frondosa*) to support healthy blood sugar, lipids and liver.
- **Hericium** (*Hericium erinaceus*) to support healthy upper digestion.

As you can see, a combination this diverse will offer *comprehensive* benefits—it ignites, warms and supports the *entire* digestive tract, while fighting troublesome symptoms from acid reflux and indigestion to flatulence and fatigue.

## Seasonal Detox is the Final Piece of the Puzzle

One last topic that I feel is absolutely essential to digestive health—and total mind and body health, for that matter—is regular seasonal detox. This is especially important in the fall, which relates to the metal element in Traditional Chinese Medicine—and more specifically to your lungs and large intestine. It's a time of judgment, reflection, and a wonderful opportunity to lighten the burden that you carry with you into winter, both physically and emotionally.

Your digestive system will play a natural role in any type of seasonal cleanse. Elimination (along with exhalation) is one of the most basic and meaningful biological activities in our body—and it's also one of the most important means of detoxification we have.

Waste removal takes place in the colon in a very literal way—but in a transcendental sense, we are also releasing old information and emotions, which are naturally tied to this essential function. As such, a colon that isn't functioning properly creates a whole host of problems, from constipation to irritable bowel syndrome—but it's also a common manifestation of emotional imbalance. The two are very much linked, and the physical *and* emotional process of “letting go” is the heart of this connection.

We aren't always aware of what we need to let go, and detoxification provides a wonderful opportunity to become more in tune with this, while acknowledging and coming to terms with the impermanent nature of all things. (On a practical level, fall detox also primes our body for the challenges of winter and especially for the tendency toward stress and overindulgence during the holidays.) Both aspects of cleansing can have a tremendous impact on your health, happiness, and wellbeing.

So what exactly is involved in an effective cleanse? Many people have advocated fasting as the primary method of detoxification, but I find that to be an unnecessarily rigid (and often very unhealthful) approach to ridding the body of harmful toxins. Instead, you should focus on the basics of healthy eating—increasing your intake of green vegetables, for example, and boosting your liquid consumption. This can be in the form of water, or vegetable soups (a particularly appealing option as the weather cools down).

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I have found that a simple lemon and olive oil drink is also an important part of any seasonal cleanse. It's easy to prepare: Just take the pieces of one organic lemon (seeds removed) and mix with about one-and-a-quarter cups of spring water, along with one tablespoon of olive oil. Then, strain the contents—not too much, as you still want some of the pectins to remain—and drink before bed on an empty stomach. This will help to support the discharge of toxins from your liver, and many of my patients have found that it improves their sleep as well.

This lemon and olive oil drink will offer intestinal support during your fall cleanse. Again, regular healthy bowel movements are essential, and clearing the liver will help to support colon elimination. For this reason, many people will also choose to include enemas or colonics in their regimens—but in my practice, I've found that simply supporting your digestion with the supplements I mentioned earlier is usually more than adequate.

In the end, *all* of these factors—herbal support, a balanced and organic diet, regular seasonal detox and calming relaxation time whenever you can get it—will add up to significant changes. The strong digestion, healthy gut, and peak-performing immune system that this integrative approach provides will set a *truly* firm foundation for lasting, vibrant total body health.

And *that's* a benefit you can count on for *years* to come.

Yours in good health,

**Isaac Eliaz, M.D., M.S, L.Ac.**

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## **About the Author: Isaac Eliaz, M.D., M.S., L.Ac.**

Dr. Isaac Eliaz, a pioneer in the field of integrative medicine since the early 1980's, is a respected author, lecturer, researcher, product formulator and clinical practitioner. Dr. Eliaz is a frequent guest lecturer on integrative medical approaches to health, immune enhancement, and cancer prevention and treatment. He has also taught several courses on Traditional Chinese Medicine for medical doctors and licensed acupuncturists. As an innovative formulator of dietary supplements, Dr. Eliaz developed and currently holds the patents for several of his unique herbal formulations. In order to substantiate nutritional approaches to health, Dr. Eliaz regularly participates in clinical studies and has been published in well-recognized, peer-reviewed journals. In addition, many of Dr. Eliaz' formulations have been submitted for validation in independent human clinical studies whose results have been published in peer-reviewed journals.

Dr. Eliaz continually studies, integrates and applies the best of health practices of both western medicine and complementary and alternative approaches. A native of Israel, Dr. Eliaz lived in the Far East and in Latin America before returning to study medicine at Tel Aviv University. While studying for his degree, Dr. Eliaz' interest turned towards the role of alternative therapies in daily health. This led to his eventual research and personal experience with yoga, shiatsu, and acupuncture as therapeutic modalities.

After graduating medical school in 1986, Dr. Eliaz established a highly successful clinical practice in Tel Aviv, utilizing his training in both western and eastern medicine. While maintaining a clinical practice, Dr. Eliaz pursued graduate studies in clinical herbology at Hebrew University of Jerusalem and classical Chinese medicine with teachers in Israel and Europe.

In 1989 Dr. Eliaz moved to the San Francisco Bay area in order to continue his studies at the American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, earning a Master of Science degree in 1991. During this time he also energetically sought-out leading practitioners of alternative medicine to broaden his knowledge and experience. Since 1991 Dr. Eliaz has maintained a busy private practice in northern California that focuses primarily on integrative, holistic protocols for cancer patients.

The guiding mission of Dr. Eliaz' professional life is achieving the integration and synergy of multiple healing modalities from both ancient and modern paradigms into a holistic practice of medicine. It is the heart of his clinical practice, of his research, and a mission that he communicates with great passion and clarity.