

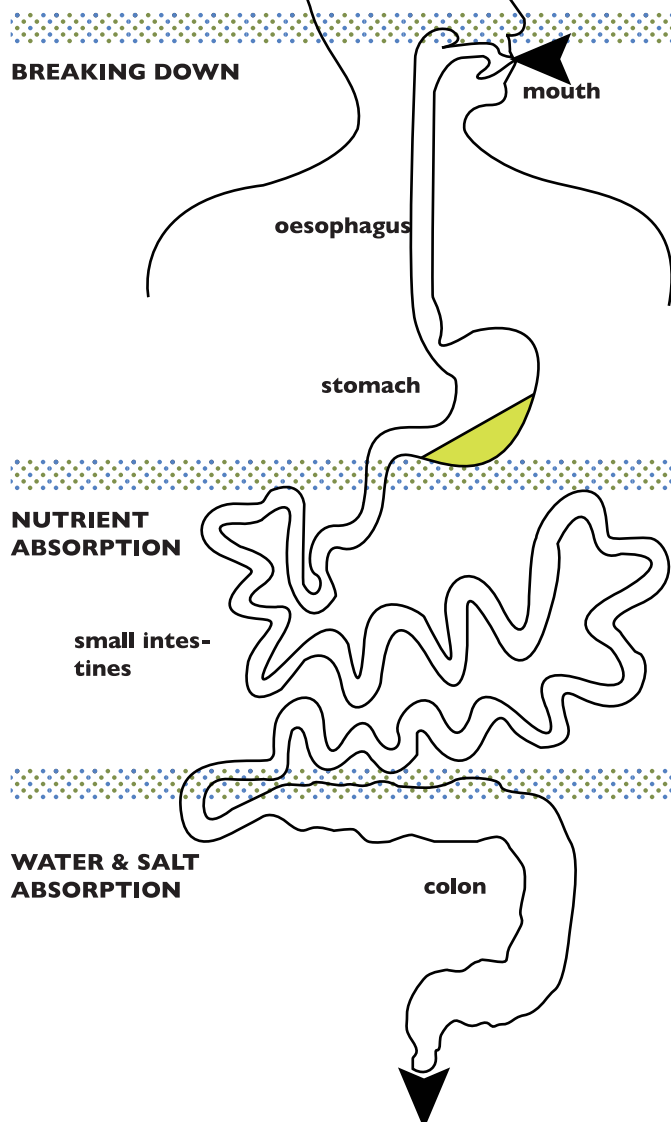
regulate your **DIGESTION**

There is a saying in Chinese Medicine: 'Above all else, protect your digestion'. Your digestion is probably the most important biological process for determining your general health. Deciding what to put in your mouth and your body's ability to digest, absorb and excrete it, will dramatically affect the quality of your life.

You may feel some of the classic symptoms like bloating, gas, constipation, pain and acid indigestion, but most people do not realise that energy levels, immune resistance, sexual health, mood and appearance are also directly linked to digestive health. In fact, almost every facet of your health starts with a good digestion.

We all will suffer from digestive health issues at some point in our lives but far too many of us just live with them or allow the conditions to become chronic. We are far too reliant on quick fix indigestion pills, liquids and laxatives to hide the symptoms instead of looking at the root causes. In this guide we will look at the most common digestive conditions and natural ways to feel better.

*the journey your
food takes*



WHAT DIGESTIVE CONDITIONS ARE THERE?

UPPER DIGESTIVE SYMPTOMS

pain, trapped wind, heartburn, nausea, bloating/belching

COMMON CONDITIONS

- **INDIGESTION** (*excessive eating and rich foods*)
- **DYSMOTILITY** (*slow functioning stomach*)
- **GERD/ACID REFLUX** (*acid leaking*)
- **ULCERS** (*bacterial irritation of stomach lining*)
- **FOOD INTOLERANCE** (*body unable to digest certain foods easily*)

LOWER DIGESTIVE SYMPTOMS

pain, feeling full, flatulence, diarrhea, constipation, bleeding, itching, mucus

COMMON CONDITIONS

- **SLUGGISH DIGESTION** (*slow functioning intestines*)
- **IBS** (*nervous and stressed digestive tract*)
- **CROHN'S DISEASE** (*chronic inflammation of digestive tract*)
- **ULCERATIVE COLITIS** (*inflammation and ulcers along digestive tract*)
- **FOOD INTOLERANCE** (*body unable to digest certain foods easily*)
- **HAEMORRHOIDS** (*swelling of veins in rectum and anus*)

WHAT CAUSES DIGESTIVE PROBLEMS?

Chinese Medicine believes that there are 3 main factors which can negatively affect your digestion:

STRESS

It is impossible to overstate how much stress affects digestion, in fact, digestive problems are commonly the first physical sign that you are under stress. Chronic conditions like IBS and constipation are usually markers of chronic, long term stress. When you are stressed you release adrenalin which actually stops your digestive system from working properly. In order to beat any digestive ailments you must also deal with your stress levels. This also includes emotional difficulties, anxiety and depression. For a more complete guide on beating stress, please read our stress guide.

DIET

It is pretty clear that if you are having problems with your digestion, then you have to look at what you are putting into your body. There are a million nutrition books out there trying to instruct you on the perfect diet. The fact is that everyone is different. In Chinese Medicine, we analyse the persons underlying syndromes and characteristics before giving specific diet advice. Some people can eat mildly spicy food, others should avoid chilli altogether, some people need more carbohydrates, others more protein. If you are suffering from a specific digestive condition then it's best to see a Chinese Medical Doctor so that they can advise you individually as part of your treatment. There are however a few general rules and guidelines for a healthier digestion (see diet advice page).

CLIMATE

Most people do not realise the effect of weather, humidity and temperature on their digestive system. Sudden changes to external temperature affects your circulation, nervous system and also your digestion. Living or working in cold, draughty conditions can weaken digestion, hot weather can cause bloating and water retention. It is important that anyone suffering from digestive health problems should try to stay warm and dress appropriately for the weather.

CHINESE MEDICINE

Digestive disorders in Chinese Medicine are generally regarded as a result of imbalances in the Stomach and Spleen, the two main organs responsible for digesting, absorbing, transporting, and transforming food into Qi and blood which nourish the body and support all other bodily functions. The Stomach governs the acceptance, digestion and passage of food and its normal movements downwards. If the Stomach energy moves the wrong way (upwards), symptoms will occur such as fullness, pain, nausea and vomiting.

The Spleen's main functions are to transform food into energy, and transport it to all parts of the body. The Spleen also shares with the Kidney the function of processing water and body liquids. Weakness of the Spleen, therefore, can lead to water retention as well as fatigue and lack of energy.

When you see a Chinese Medical doctor you will be asked many questions in order to see what particular syndromes you suffer from

and how they relate to your digestion. You will then be treated with herbs and acupuncture for your syndromes which will help your digestion as well as seemingly unrelated symptoms such as fatigue, skin problems etc.

Some of the classic syndromes that cause digestive conditions are:

LIVER QI STAGNATION - This is the major syndrome for stress and can lead to IBS and food sensitivity.

SPLEEN QI DEFICIENCY - This is a slightly more advanced syndrome that can be caused by stress or other factors. It leads to excessive mucus, inflammation and bloating. Most people with spleen QI deficiency feel sluggish and tired.

STOMACH QI DEFICIENCY - This is the main syndrome related to indigestion or dysmotility.

YANG DEFICIENCY - People suffering from this syndrome tend to have a lot of diarrhea and need to eat warm foods.

EXCESS SYNDROME - This causes water retention, weight gain and a general heavy feeling after food.

EMBARRASSED?

There are many people who are too embarrassed to come and get help for their digestive problems. Our doctors discuss toilet habits with every single one of our patients, every single day. Don't let embarrassment stop you from getting some treatment.

To book an appointment with one of our doctors call 08700 100 023

SUCK IN THAT STOMACH!

A great way of waking your digestive system up before meals or in the morning is the abdominal lift. Simply stand and place your hands on your bended knees. Now exhale and pull your stomach in towards your spine as much as you can. Hold it for 5-10 seconds then release and inhale. Repeat this 5 times and then stand upright and relax.

DIET ADVICE FOR HAPPIER DIGESTION

Here are some general guidelines for a healthier and more efficient digestive system.



INTOLERANCES

How do you feel after eating a lot of pasta and bread. Do you feel sluggish, bloated, and gassy? Many of us are intolerant to certain foods like gluten and dairy. There are expensive intolerance tests that you can do but just cutting the suspicious foods from your diet for a few days should tell you all that you need to know. If you feel better then it's worth getting into the habit of cooking and eating meals that are free of the offending foods. It may seem like too much of a restriction but you'll be amazed at how easy it can be and it will make you feel so much better. Like all diet advice, be balanced and sensible - you can always give yourself a treat.



FIBRE

You should be eating about 18g of fibre a day. Insoluble fibre acts like a binder to keep you regular and prevent constipation, whereas soluble fibre helps reduce blood cholesterol and control blood sugar. The best sources of fibre also tend to be very healthy so a high fibre diet is even more beneficial. Fruits, vegetables and pulses are best.



LIMIT RAW FOODS

Raw food is an excellent source of nutrition but can be hard work for the body to digest. Chinese doctors recommend that anyone with digestive health issues should stay away from salads, raw vegetables and cold food in general (like sandwiches). Lightly steaming or stir frying all vegetables will keep their nutrients but make them better for your digestive system.



STAY AWAY FROM THE COLD

In Chinese Medicine, the digestive process is a warm one and is negatively affected by cold. One of the biggest differences between the Western and Chinese diets is not the food but the drink. If you drink cold liquid with a meal then all of the fats will solidify and turn your food into a sticky sludge that slows down your digestion and becomes stagnant. Stagnant food in Chinese Medicine can lead to excessive phlegm and mucus, and cause all sorts of conditions like fatigue, weight gain, allergies, immune weakness and headaches.

Cold liquid also consumes your body's energy to heat it up and this takes away resources from your digestion. A weakened digestion means that it is unable to efficiently absorb nutrients and energy. This also applies to cold food like ice cream. Drink warm liquid with all of your meals and you'll be amazed at how different you feel. Low caffeine tea (oolongs are a good choice) is perfect because it also contains essential oils to help your digestion.



HIGH VEG

Foods high in animal fat can lead to a sluggish and exhausted digestion. That's not to say that you can't eat any meat but make sure that you have green vegetables with every meal that double the amount of meat you're eating. Fish, and lean meat are the best sources of digestion friendly protein.



NO CHILLI

Spicy foods bring excessive heat to the body and can aggravate your stomach and intestines. Keep spice levels low until your body recovers.



PREBIOTICS AND PROBIOTICS

Every culture has fermented foods and we should be eating it regularly. Miso, kimchi, sauerkraut, active yoghurts, kefir, kombucha - find your favourites.

TEA FOR DIGESTION

Warm drinks are good for your digestion and dark teas are high in essential oils which help your body to digest food. It is better to stay away from higher caffeine teas if you feel you are sensitive to caffeine. Go for dark oolongs like Empress Oolong or try one of these amazing digestive drinks.



SENNA

Herbal laxative which is fairly strong. Not recommended for long term use as the body can become lazy.



PU'ERH TEA

An amazing tea to help with indigestion after a heavy or rich meal.

HOW TO EAT

The way that you eat is almost as important as your food choices.

1. CHEW & EAT SLOWLY

Chewing is the first stage of digestion. It breaks down the food and mixes it with the enzymes in your saliva so that your body does not have to work so hard after you swallow. Take time with every mouthful and enjoy the food. It takes 20 mins for your stomach to tell your brain that you are full. In this 20 minute window you are overeating, so eating slowly will mean that you won't give your body too much extra to digest.

2. EAT LESS OFTEN

Do not continuously tax your body by forcing it to digest several times a day. Instead eat two to three times during the day.

3. DON'T EAT ON THE RUN

Give yourself a window of time for eating. Eating on the run or whilst working, means that you tend to choose unbalanced meals and adds extra stress to your digestion.

4. GO TO BED WITH A NEUTRAL STOMACH

When you sleep your digestive system slows down. A big meal just before bed will not digest properly and will also affect your sleep, leaving you tired in the morning. It is equally bad to go to bed hungry. Instead try to go to sleep feeling 'stomach neutral'. If you feel a bit hungry then drink a warm herbal tea and maybe have some nuts which are both calming and will not cause a blood sugar peak.

5. KEEP FRUIT SEPARATE

If you eat fruit with or directly after a meal then it takes longer to digest and will begin to ferment. This can cause bloating, wind and even pain. Look at fruit as a separate meal and try not to eat any within an hour of other food.

6. START THE DAY WITH A CLEANSE

Squeeze the juice of a lemon into a glass of warm water and drink first thing in the morning. This wakes up your digestive system, cleanses the stomach and intestines of debris from the day before and regulates your stomach acid level.

7. RUB YOUR STOMACH

It may seem obvious but after a big meal, try gently rubbing your stomach and belly in a clockwise motion for several minutes. This adds warmth and energy to the area, helping clear any stagnation and improving nutrient absorption.

8. GO FOR A WALK

After eating, people usually go and sit down but the best way to help your body digest is to go for a slow and relaxing walk directly after eating. This helps to promote the movement of food through your system and prevents indigestion.