

Hope & Healing

Digestive Do's And Don'ts

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

Introduction

Medical problems of the digestive system are common. Millions of Americans are admitted to the hospital because of them every year. Each section of the digestive system can develop a number of medical problems, and there are many solutions; the mouth, the esophagus, the stomach, the small and large intestines, and the rectum. Then there's the digestive organs and glands — the liver, gall bladder, and pancreas — that are also part of the system.

Disorders of the digestive system afflict nearly everyone at one time or another.

Taking Care of the Digestive System

It is the job of the digestive system to break down our food and take into our bodies the portions that create energy and keep us healthy, while getting rid of the remainder. Follow these guidelines and your system will work better and last longer.

- Eat a well balanced diet that includes a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grain breads, cereals, and other grain products.
- Eat slowly and, whenever possible, try to relax after each meal.
- Exercise regularly.
- Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all.
- Avoid large amounts of caffeine.

- Use caution when taking over-the-counter drugs and always follow your doctor's directions exactly when taking prescribed medications.

- Don't smoke.

Digestive Disorders

Heartburn

After food enters the stomach it isn't meant to back up into the esophagus, but it does. And when it does it causes a burning feeling or pain or both, due to stomach acid. If this happens occasionally, it is no cause for alarm. If it happens often, try the following measures:

- Don't overeat.
- Avoid clothing that is tight at the waist.
- Avoid straining during bowel movements. The pressure from straining forces food into the esophagus.
- Don't lie down until several hours after eating.
- Don't sleep flat. Elevate the head of your bed by six inches or more.
- Don't eat fat.
- Try to avoid drugs that cause heartburn: birth control pills, Valium, and antihistamines.
- Don't smoke. Nicotine contributes directly to heartburn. If heartburn continues, ask your doctor about it.

Gas

Swallowed air causes most belching. Some rectal gas comes from swallowed air, but most of it is produced in the bowel by the fermentation of

carbohydrate foods. The fermentation is caused by the normal germs that all of us have in our large intestines. Consequently, everybody passes gas and there's no need to worry about it if it is an occasional thing. If the amount of gas passed is large, it can be a social embarrassment, but it isn't a symptom of cancer or any other serious medical problem.

How to Reduce Gas:

- Soak pinto beans overnight and discard the soaking water. Cook the beans in fresh water.
- Chew food thoroughly. Don't gulp solid food or liquids because air also enters at the time. Eat slowly.
- Avoid constipation.
- If you have trouble digesting milk, stick to cheese, yogurt, and special lactase-treated milk.
- Don't expect much relief from over-the-counter medicines.

Constipation

Constipation is the failure to have a bowel movement after three days or more. You may have a movement five times daily, or as seldom as every third day and still be normal. What is important is that you never ignore the urge to have a bowel movement.

You can correct constipation or prevent it altogether by drinking plenty of fluids, exercising regularly, and eating a

diet high in fiber. This includes cereals, especially bran cereals, fruits, vegetables, and foods of the bean family. And you must allow yourself time to have a bowel movement.

In fact, if everyone did these things we could save most of the 40 million dollars we spend each year on laxatives.

Diarrhea

Simple diarrhea is common and has many causes: bacterial or viral infections, contaminated food or drinking water, antibiotics, excessive use of antacids and the inability to digest milk products.

Simple diarrhea usually clears up without treatment. But, in small children and the elderly, dehydration can occur and the situation becomes serious. At any age, consult your doctor if:

- Diarrhea lasts more than 48 hours.
- There is severe abdominal cramps.
- There is blood in your stool.
- You have dizziness.
- You have diarrhea that alternates with constipation.

Prevention

Food poisoning can be prevented by taking care to prepare, cook, and store food properly. If milk products cause you to have diarrhea, avoid those that cause you trouble or drink milk treated with lactase.

Treatment of Diarrhea _____

First, and foremost, drink water, fruit juices, or clear broth to help prevent dehydration. Avoid alcohol, caffeine, milk or milk products. Sometimes Pepto-Bismol or Imodium can help control run-of-the-mill diarrhea. Food poisoning can be allowed to run its course in some cases, but if there is bloody diarrhea consult your doctor.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome _____

Irritable Bowel Syndrome or spastic colon is a problem of younger women, for the most part. Irritable Bowel Syndrome causes diarrhea alternating

with constipation, nausea, bloating, pain in the abdomen, gas, painful bowel movements and indigestion.

No one knows what causes Irritable Bowel Syndrome. If you frequently have symptoms like the ones mentioned, consult your doctor.

Treatment

- Reduce the stress in your life. This above everything else seems to be important in controlling irritable bowel. Try using relaxation techniques.
- Begin an exercise program.
- Begin a food diary. Record the foods that trigger your symptoms.
- Gradually increase the fiber in your diet. **Caution** A low-fiber diet helps some people. Experiment to see which helps you most.
- If you smoke, quit.
- If none of these self-help measures work, your doctor may prescribe a bulk laxative to stimulate the muscle contractions of your bowel and add volume to your bowel movement. Additionally, a drug to control abdominal pain and muscle spasms may also be prescribed.

Summary _____

Most of the time our digestive systems stay free of trouble. If any of the following occur, call your doctor.

- Stomach pains that are severe, long lasting, occur over and over or occur with shaking chills.
- Vomiting blood or continuous vomiting.
- Diarrhea for more than 3 days or sudden onset of constipation.
- Bloody stools or jet-black stools.
- Continuing loss of appetite or unexpected weight loss.

Awaken the Miracles Within You

The Miracle of the Mills of God

We are all in a hurry. Slow down. When you are going to live forever, a year or two, or five, seems short. The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small.

We know that whatsoever we sow we shall also reap. Sometimes, however, the reaping takes a long time. If it seems that you haven't gotten what you deserve in life, don't panic, the mills are not yet through grinding.

Every good thought or word or deed produces its fruit of happiness. Sooner or later every prayer is answered.

And, every negative thought or word or deed — that we have or do must also be met and overcome.

Nature always takes her time. To understand things we must take the long view.

The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.