

Gut feelings

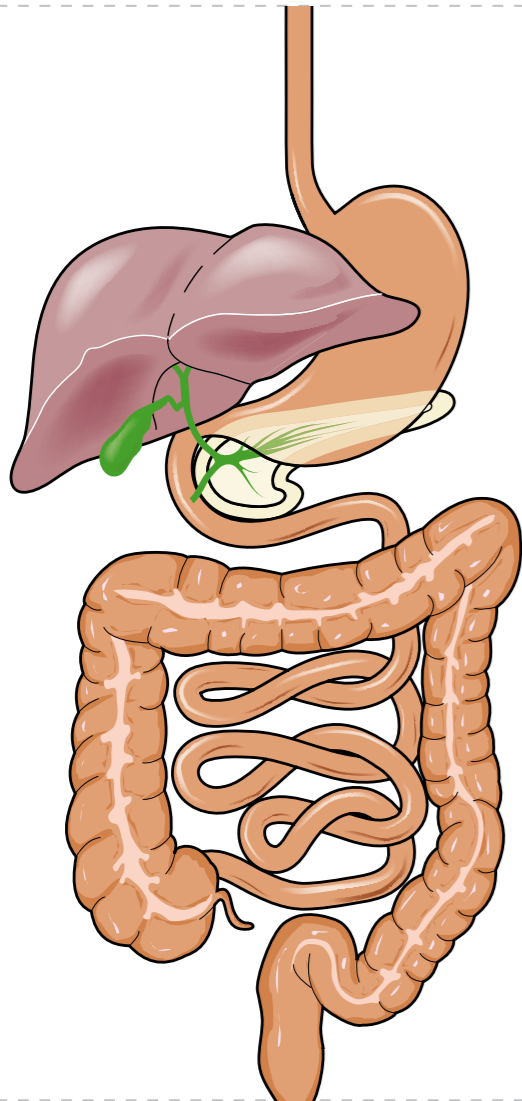
Maintaining a healthy digestive system is important for your general health and well-being

By Adrienne Harebottle

Feeling bloated and gassy is a clear indicator of a digestive problem

A poor digestive system can result in inflammatory bowel ailments

Looking at the stool is a good way to read your digestive health



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Feeling bloated, sluggish and uncomfortable aren't the endings you choose to a pleasant meal, but these are some of the issues that haunt those suffering from unhealthy digestive systems. Kay Vosloo, certified practitioner in colon hydrotherapy and nutritional therapist, explains how the digestive system works and its importance.

Without a working system, says Vosloo, our bodies can't function. You could eat all day and you'd still be starving yourself of the needed nutrients. "The digestive system is essential for maintaining all

processes in the body. It is through digestion that we take in food, break down nutrients, absorb and assimilate them," says Vosloo. "A digestive system that functions properly supports all bodily systems — immune, nervous and circulatory systems."

HEALTHY DIGESTIVE SYSTEM

The digestive system comprises two sub-systems: the digestive tract or alimentary canal and the associated organs. The mouth, oesophagus, stomach, small and large intestines, rectum, anus and



Kay Vosloo is a nutritional therapist and a certified practitioner in colon hydrotherapy

organs back on track. Looking at your stool is a good way to read your digestive health, as its appearance indicates which area of your body or which organ isn't working properly, Vosloo says.

A stool that is grey in colour suggests that you could be anaemic, meaning there is a lack of iron in your blood. This also indicates that your gall bladder isn't functioning optimally; if left untreated, gall bladder stones could occur.

The digestive process begins even before food enters the mouth

appendix make up the digestive tract, while the associated organs are the liver, gall bladder and pancreas. All these parts are designed to work together, so as with any team, you need each member to be in its best condition. To have good digestive health, you need functioning organs, but without a good digestive system, your organs won't function well. Here's where your awareness plays a role.

POOR DIGESTIVE SYSTEM

Feeling bloated and gassy, and having abdominal pain are clear indicators of a digestive problem but a sluggish system affects the body in more ways. "A poor digestive system can result in a heavy feeling in the chest, acid reflux, halitosis, constipation, allergies and intolerances, yeast overgrowth or candida, moodiness, depression, bad skin and the list goes on," says Vosloo, adding that it's dangerous to ignore symptoms of a poor digestive system. "If left untreated, this can over time result in inflammatory bowel ailments such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis and other degenerative diseases such as cancer."

COLOUR OF HEALTH

Identifying poor digestion is the first step to getting your body and

White stools indicate that your diet is low in fibre. Apples (with skin), pears, avocados, carrots, oats and beans are great sources of fibre, so tuck in. Fibre is needed for the colon to be able to push the waste along so it can be removed.

A sticky stool that leaves marks on the toilet bowl indicates that your salt or alcohol intake is too high.

Lactose intolerance will cause a mucus covered stool.

The size and texture is important too, Vosloo says. Ideally, your faeces should resemble the shape of a banana. Pebble-looking stools that are very hard or runny and muddy stools are indicative of problems. You should also be worried if your motions are irregular.

BOWEL AND EMOTIONS

"The bowel is the seat of all emotions," says Vosloo. "Women tend to be open and talk about problems; men hold back." If you are passing stools that resemble rabbit droppings, you need to start talking. "Rabbit droppings can be prevalent among those who close themselves up," Vosloo says.

What we eat and drink can change the way we feel, so it makes sense that the digestive system also affects our emotions. Serotonin is nature's feel-good chemical. This neurotransmitter

is credited with influencing our overall sense of well-being, helping to regulate moods, temper and anxiety. It also affects appetite, metabolism and sexuality. Vosloo says that between 80 and 90 per cent of your body's serotonin is produced by the bowel, the remainder by the brain. "A sluggish or unhealthy large intestine can affect serotonin production, affecting our moods."

THE FACTORY WITHIN

The digestive process begins before food even enters your mouth; it starts at the sight and smell of food. If you get hungry looking at and smelling food that's being prepared, it's a good thing because it means your system is in gear and ready to go.

Food has to pass through the oesophagus to reach the stomach. This is why you need to chew your food properly. Swallow small bites as they will pass through the oesophagus easily. Chewing also helps produce saliva which has antibacterial properties — it can help clean your food before it hits the stomach. Your saliva also produces amylase, which is an enzyme that breaks down simple starches and carries them through the flesh in your mouth to the bloodstream.

Once inside the stomach, the food is broken down by gastric acids that contain hydrochloric acid and protein digesting enzymes. This leaves the food in a liquid state called chyme.

Chyme leaves the stomach for the small intestine. This is where the most digestion and absorption of nutrients takes place. The small intestine is full of juices such as bile from the liver, pancreatic juice from the pancreas and intestinal juice from the intestine that aid digestion.

A few hours later, the chyme moves to the large intestine (colon). The colon absorbs the liquid from the chyme, allowing it to bulk. The absorbed water, electrolytes and nutrients are recycled into circulation. This is a very important process because the colon is responsible for pushing the food

(at this point, the waste) along and if bulking doesn't occur, the colon can't grip the food to move it. Fibre ensures that the waste bulks. If the waste doesn't pass through the large intestine easily, constipation occurs.

COLON HYDROTHERAPY

Realising that your system isn't functioning well is only the first step in getting your body on track. You can do plenty of other things to help your system, such as opt for an alternative medical therapy like colon hydrotherapy, which uses purified water to cleanse the large intestine. It helps remove wastes and toxins, and restores normal, daily bowel function.

Some of the benefits include increased bowel movement, improved nutrition absorption and raised stamina.

Colon hydrotherapy also encourages weight loss and long-term weight management, as increased bowel movement leads to better digestive health, which helps speed up your metabolism, control your appetite and reduce your cravings.

Any one can benefit from this ancient practice, even those with a fine-tuned digestive system — giving your body a little boost never hurts. **B+**

75 per cent of all cells in your body are bacteria

The ancient Egyptians used colon hydrotherapy

If you suffer from heartburn, you should avoid lying down for three hours after eating

After entering the mouth, it takes 24 hours for food to make its way out of the body