



SUMMIT

Naturopathic News

DIGESTIVE DISORDERS

Gastrointestinal disorders are extremely common and can make normal life very challenging. Many people suffer from exceptional amounts of gas, bloating, cramping, constipation, diarrhea, heartburn, nausea or general discomfort.

Digestive disorders may be caused by or may lead to a wide variety of other health problems. For this reason, it is important to take a comprehensive approach when addressing digestive complaints. Likewise, a holistic approach to treating any health-related issue always considers the state of digestion. The integrity of the digestive tract is essential in order to supply our bodies with the vitamins, minerals, proteins, fats, carbohydrates and protective phytochemicals needed for us to function and fight off disease.

The digestive tract, or gut, can be compared to a smooth flowing freeway. Vehicles enter and they exit. Heavy traffic leads to congestion. Speeding causes the opposite problem. Pedestrians and bicycles are the wrong types of organisms, and they can interfere with traffic flow. Accidents can be compared to inflammation and chemical spills to toxemia, and both damage the terrain. Police cars are like the white blood cells that monitor disease, and keep the gut healthy.

Both interstates and digestive tracts can have structural problems. Examples in the gut include diverticulosis, tumors, polyps, hemorrhoids and ulcers. These types of problems can be detected by special imaging, and require specific treatments.

Often though, X-rays, colonoscopies and MRI's are negative even when the problem persists. In these cases, the discomfort may be caused by *functional* problems.

When addressing functional digestive disorders, there are a number of important steps to consider. Most importantly, any obstacle to cure must be removed. In other words, any factor that is inhibiting normal function makes it impossible to completely heal. Obstacles include food allergies, lack of digestive enzymes, parasites, yeast, poor nutrition, smoking, certain medications, and very often, stress. The latter is extremely important. "Butterflies in the stomach" is a perfect illustration of the mind-body connection. Our thoughts do have an effect on our body, and the digestion is often the first system to be compromised. Specialized functional tests, such as food allergy tests, allergy elimination techniques, digestive health panels or adrenal stress panels may be needed to find the problem.

Once the obstacle has been identified and removed, the repair crews must come in. An unhealthy digestive tract often has suffered from inflammation, which leads to damage of the intestinal lining. Microscopic food particles or organisms can then leak out of the gut and into the blood stream. This may then lead to allergies, infection or autoimmune disorders. It is therefore important to support healing of the cells that line the stomach, small and large intestines.

For optimal flow and function, it is also important to replace any missing pieces. Enzymes and stomach acid are essential for proper digestion. If your pancreas is not secreting sufficient amounts of enzymes or your stomach is low in hydrochloric acid, it may be necessary to replace or stimulate your body's production of these substances.

Finally, it is important to balance the organisms in the gut. The term “dysbiosis” refers to a common imbalance of healthy and pathogenic intestinal bacteria. Pathogenic bacteria may cause any number of complaints. Healthy bacteria help fight disease, reduce allergies, optimize digestion and keep pathogenic bacteria and candida (yeast) in check.

Once a healthy digestive tract is restored, it’s important to maintain it. Adequate amounts of water and fiber, such as ground flax seed, whole grains and fruits and vegetables, are essential. Proper nutrition is essential, as well as exercise and of course, stress management.