HEALTHY DIGESTION

The Importance of Eating in a Relaxed Environment

It's a bit of a cliché, but we need to understand how stress affects our digestion. Your Parasympathetic Nervous System (Resting & Digesting) is responsible for bile and stomach acid production and is dominant when you are relaxed. The Sympathetic Nervous System (Fight or Flight) is dominant when you are stressed or running on adrenalin. If you are continually in this state you will not be producing the right amount of stomach acid and bile for proper digestion.

Gut pH

The pH of food changes as it moves through the digestive system. Some areas need a more acidic environment and other areas need to be more alkaline. The stomach needs to be a pH of 1-2. In high stress situations the pH increases to 4-5 due to lack of stomach acid production. This impairs proper food digestion in the stomach and due to the high pH it doesn't send the message in the duodenum to secrete bile (from the liver and gallbladder) and bicarbonates (from the pancreas). Bile is necessary for fat digestion, vitamin absorption and keeping the bowels moving. If bile and bicarbs are not secreted it will lead to constipation, fermentation, bloating and feed all the unfavourable organisms in the digestive system. The pH of the food will remain too acidic and create inflammation all along the digestive tract.

Flies Don't Accumulate Around a Clean Rubbish Bin

This might not be the most flattering analogy but it serves to demonstrate how keeping your digestive environment healthy will automatically guarantee healthy gut microorganisms without bacterial, parasite or yeast overgrowth. Treating gut infections without correcting the environment is a pointless exercise.

Correcting the pH

- Eat in a relaxed environment. Sit down, take a deep breath, taste your food. Don't eat in front of the TV or computer, and don't eat while working or on the run.
- Stimulate digestive juices before a meal with apple cider vinegar or lemon juice in water, aloe vera juice, or digestive bitters.
- Digestive enzymes with betaine will help to produce more hydrochloric acid. Betaine is found in beets. Zinc is also important for stomach acid production.
- Chew your food! Smaller food particles increases the surface area for enzymes to work properly.
- Don't use antacids! They are meant for short term use (read the labels) but most people are on them for years. They continually lower the stomach pH which will lead to severe gut dysbiosis and other systemic problems over time.

Antacids

Low stomach pH or high stomach acid will send the message to the duodenal valve to close, thus stopping stomach acid from entering the oesophagus (ie reflux). When the stomach acid is too low this signal does not come through and the valve stays open, leading to reflux. So contrary to popular belief, reflux/indigestion is the result of **too little** stomach acid and NOT too much. Antacids make this condition worse over time.

This is a very quick overview and there are lots more detail on our website. You can also follow the links:

Stress & Digestion: *http://shop.realizehealth.com.au/content/117-stress-digestion*
Feeding your Gut Bacteria: *http://shop.realizehealth.com.au/content/116-gut-bacteria-and-what-to-feed-them*