

Core Restore Physio & Fitness



HERBS TO HELP

digestive woes

introduction



DID YOU KNOW?

Our digestive system has a very important job; to break down food enabling nutrients to enter the bloodstream and circulate to all parts of our body, including where they are needed most. Healthy herbs and spices don't just flavour food, but also carry additional health benefits; hence why the art of herbalism is such an ancient medicine, and has been around for at least 60, 000 years. Leaves, stalks, seeds, flowers and roots of a plant all have medicinal properties which are backed up by modern science, and the use of them not only enhances your health through their individual properties, but is also thought to lead to less likelihood of adding sugars and salts for flavourings. I got really interested in herbal medicine when I studied menopause in more detail; but their use goes far beyond easing a hot flash. In this guide we'll delve into their use in gut health and immunity. Read on and I'll tell you more....

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Symptoms of indigestion may appear as heartburn, a coated tongue, bloating, wind, headache, nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, foul breath, and bad taste in the mouth. You may even experience palpitations and difficulty breathing. Botanicals provided by nature not only bring about the desired results in digestive disorders but also work in a very gentle manner. Culinary herbs, combined with certain foods, help prevent indigestion and are known to counteract stomach acidity, nausea, and nervous indigestion.



Writings on the use of herbs as an aid for toning up the stomach takes us back many centuries. In former times, every home had its own herb garden, and the lady of the house always seemed to know just which herb was best for improving the appetite and which one would relieve heartburn, wind, bloating or nausea. These old remedies are still with us today and are rapidly regaining their former popularity.

“Herbs & Spices act as digestive stimulents

We've probably all experienced indigestion from eating too much at one time. You might suffer from IBS (irritable bowel syndrome) or struggle with diarrhoea; these are just a couple of problems that plague the digestive system. Our liver also forms part of the digestive area and needs special attention because of its significant role in our bodies. It benefits from strong enhancements like digestive herbs to keep the body functioning. The liver is, in fact, a wonderful 'factory', performing over 500 major tasks in our body, making use of literally thousands of varying enzymes. One of its very important functions is to act as a filtering system for our blood. One can't afford to not take care of the digestive system when you realise just what a vital role it plays in determining our overall health.



TRIED & TESTED BY THE ANCIENTS

Most people think of culinary herbs solely in terms of flavour, not realising their original purpose was therapeutic. When our ancestors began consuming more meat and rich foods, they found their illness increased. In response, they realised taking medicine with their food in the form of herbs such as ginger, fennel, anise, sage or mint could help prevent indigestion. Mint added to peas, for example, offsets the tendency of peas to produce gas and resultant bloating. The custom of serving mint sauce with lamb is not merely a matter of taste; young meat is more difficult to digest and the mint helps to prevent it from disagreeing with your digestive system. Marjoram, another popular culinary herb, was also employed mainly as a digestive aid; sweet marjoram is chiefly used as a condiment in cooking to diminish the heaviness of pork, goose, and other foods. American Indians also fully recognised the true purpose of culinary herbs and combined them with food to improve digestibility. The flavour factor was secondary but an added bonus.

Each herb within this guide plays an important and unique purpose in digestion and detoxification of the body. Before we delve into individual herbs and their properties, first of all, consider why you may develop digestion problems in the first place. The below is a brief example of contributing factors to digestive issues:

- Are you chewing properly?
- Are you drinking too much liquid with your meal?
- Do you take a lot of antibiotics?
- Are you fond of juicing and eating cold, raw foods?
- Is there too much sugar and salt in your diet?
- Are you drinking too much artificial alkaline water?



artichoke

According to legend, it is believed that Zeus was angered by one he loved, Cynara, casting her out from Olympia and turning her into an artichoke as punishment. The scientific name *Cynara cardunculus* takes its origins from the story. This wonderful herb has been used for medicinal digestive purposes since the Roman Empire. It belongs to the sunflower family and can grow as high as six foot.

Artichoke is well known for its medical qualities, being documented by pupils of Aristotle, the Greek philosopher. It is used as a liver tonic due to its powerful restorative properties. A very strong herb for digestive aid, it stimulates the flow of bile in the body leading to improved digestion, also helping the body with the breaking down of food more effectively. It also is known to strengthen kidney function.

The main ingredient in the artichoke is known as cynarin, found in high concentrations in the leaves. As a top herb for the digestive system, artichoke soothes IBS, and improves nausea, constipation and bloating. Research shows that this plant also has the ability to maintain normal levels of cholesterol.



ginger

Ginger is considered one of the top herbs with it comes to digestion. A soothing, warming spice, it impacts on the circulatory system., and dates back to Roman Empire days, holding an honorary place for use in traditional medicines. Ginger root has been used by Chinese herbalists for approximately 2000 years already and the ancient Greeks used it to make their bread.

It grows wild in Asia and is used therapeutically to control upset stomach and nausea due to its anti-emetic properties, and is also useful for alleviating stomach cramps. There are excellent anti-inflammatory components (gingerol and zingerones), making it a natural remedy for heartburn, nausea from motion sickness, and as a superb normaliser for the digestive processes. Before he ate anything, it is believed A regarded Chinese philosopher, Confucius, would sprinkle this digestive herb over his meals believing it would promote appetite and help to expel gas from the intestinal tract and stomach.

I've included a Chinese formula reputed to be excellent for restoring strength to the stomach and promoting healthy digestion at the end of this guide for you to try.



slippery elm

Today, finely powdered slippery elm bark is considered one of nature's finest demulcents, easing inflammation and irritation, as a result of its ability to neutralise stomach acidity and absorb foul gases, in fact its action is so gentle that it is able to be retained even by a delicate stomach, when other foods are rejected. It is also effective in the digestion of milk, by separating the casein particles, and due to its mucilage (a sticky mixture of sugars which aren't broken down by the digestive tract) it's often used in commercial throat lozenges. Due to its slightly gooey texture, it helps the whole process of assimilation and elimination.

Slippery elm acts as a bulwark against irritations and inflammation of the mucous membranes. Native Americans long ago used the inner bark of the elm tree to make poultices to heal damaged skin, and wrapped it around meat to prevent it from going bad. It drew out the poisons from abscesses and boils, soothing the skin when mixed with water. American soldiers also used it to heal gunshot wounds during the American Revolution. .Only the inner bark has therapeutic properties



peppermint

A hybrid plant from spearmint and watermint, peppermint is aromatic and calming. The leaves can be dried or used fresh within tea. It's long been considered to be effective in relieving stomach gas, wind, and any resultant distress, due to its ability to calm irritation and inflammation, and is also useful in calming menstrual cramps and diarrhoea due to its antispasmodic properties. There is some evidence it can aid anxiety and tension headaches due to its calming restorative benefits, and common cold symptoms due to menthol acting as a decongestant. Because it is caffeine-free, this beverage won't cause any restlessness and keep you awake at night; in fact, it can be useful for muscle and joint soreness. It is palatable, aromatic and refreshing. You can easily take it as a wholesome tisane by each member of the family, but should use with caution if you have existing gastrointestinal issues.

For young children, just one or two tablespoons of this tea, sweetened with honey is ideal for stomach ache. Studies reveal that using peppermint oil is a treatment accepted to treat IBS because the oil helps in easing bloating, spasms and cramps, and it can also assist with skin issues including itching and redness.



angelica

Possibly deriving its name due to blossoming on the archangel St Michael's Day, another naming version from the Middle Ages states its from when a devout man dreamed St. Michael appeared and told him the plant was a cure for the dreaded plague, the Black Death. There are repeat repeated references to the belief that anyone who kept a piece of angelica root in their mouth all day would be immune from contagious diseases throughout literature.

Angelica is a popular flavouring agent in gin and benedictine, medicinally being used for indigestion, gas and bloating, and even insomnia. In some countries the stalks are candied, roots roasted, and leaves prepared and eaten like spinach. The seeds or roots were used as a tea in old times as a favourite for relieving painful bloating and gas. Dr. Vogel of Switzerland used to say that the fresh plant extract of angelica had an excellent effect on the digestion; on irritations of the gastric mucous membranes, on loss of appetite (such as in anorexia), and also on stomach cramps. The liqueur recipe at the end of this book is one of his, and he swore by it as a pleasant remedy for digestive trouble or wind.

Angelica should be used with caution in pregnancy as it may cause uterine contractions, and in larger volumes can cause sun sensitivity.



anise

Anise is of Eastern origin but is now cultivated in many parts of the world. It has an ancient reputation as a carminative (easing wind), stomachic (aiding digestion), expectorant (loosens mucus in lungs) and flavouring agent. Several centuries ago, the Romans and Greeks used anise in relishes, seasoning, sauces, and wines, just like we do today. The seeds were chewed as a breath sweetener and to stimulate the appetite. Romans also served their guests cake flavoured strongly with anise seeds at the end of a meal in order to assist digestion, and is the origin of us serving wedding cake at the end of meal festivities. Not only is it thought this will help digestion to offset overindulgence from overeating, but anise potentially has a blood-sugar stabilising effect, preventing sugar crashes after high-calorie/high energy foods.

John Gerard, an early herbalist, recommended anise seeds as being good against belching in the stomach, and it is still considered a good domestic remedy for preventing gas and fermentation in the stomach and bowels if a tea is brewed from the seeds and taken warm.

It's also very popular in reducing menopause symptoms, but due to it's similar effects to oestrogen, it's not suitable for people who have hormone sensitive illnesses such as some types of cancer.



fennel

Known as “the friend of the stomach”, fennel is part of the carrot/parsley family, and dates back to ancient Greek times. It is reputed to have a soothing effect on the mucous membranes of the stomach and to be wonderfully effective in helping people bothered by excessive belching and flatulence. There are also recommendations for its use in culinary practice to aid in the digestion of fish, beans, peas, cabbage, and cheese, and historically has been used to ward off evil spirits too!

One or two teaspoons of warm fennel tea were given to infants for the relief of colic, and the seeds were also used to assist with the aching pain tendencies associated with laxative use. In Italy, the use of the dwarf varieties of fennel dates back to the days of early Romans when gladiators mixed fennel with their food, claiming it gave them strength. Today, fennel teas are available to aid digestion, especially after eating rice and oily fish, and seeds are baked into breads, meat and stuffing and used to favour liqueurs. It can also be used to promote weight loss, inhibiting hunger, with seeds often being chewed over lent. In New Zealand, fennel containing foods are encouraged to assist with lactation post-birth, but it should not be used in pregnancy due to toxicity concerns.



digestive bitters

The custom of employing bitters as a stomach tonic is age-old. Romans, notorious for their overindulgences, believed bitters were necessary with food to aid digestion and relieve bloating. Today, bitters are still highly valued by many people. In Iceland, Lapland, and Greenland, bread and beverages are made of bitter Icelandic moss; bitter herbs are also added to alcoholic beverages. In other nations, wild dandelion leaves are used in salads. Amongst Germans, gentian is a highly prized bitter herb; it is reputed to be a powerful tonic which strengthens the digestive system and improves appetite to a remarkable degree, aiding stomach cramps. Father Kneipp, renowned herbalist and water healer, advocated gentian tincture taken in drops on sugar to soothe stomachs after tedious journeys or overindulgence of food or drink.

Golden Seal is another highly regarded bitter. Cherokee Indians used it as a tonic for certain complaints. It is known to relieve uncomfortable fullness, heartburn, and nausea. Dr. Finley Ellingwood, famed herbalist, wrote that in his opinion, golden seal's widest range of action was upon the stomach, as it removed heaviness after eating.

In modern British volumes on botanical drugs, golden seal is cited as being a very valuable remedy in 'disordered states of the digestive system'. As a remedy for various gastric inflammatory conditions, it will be found of value in all cases of biliousness and dyspepsia. Yarrow is also considered to be excellent for easing cramps associated with IBS, and has been found to be used medicinally since Neanderthal times.



*Some herbs
interact with
modern medicines
so always seek
advice from your
GP if you take
regular
medications*

It's probably fair to say that we all wish for excellent digestion, especially healthy bowel movements, give the hormonal and pelvic floor benefits of this too. Certainly, it's a great idea to include herbs and bitters within any diet, but to gain the most benefit it's worth considering the rest of your diet too. Unhealthier fats and refined sugars are the top two offenders when it comes to digestive problems.

So, what can we do to improve digestion? Get your herb on! Use them in abundance in food prep, and consider herbal teas (natural ones; not ones with all the extra bits and bobs added). Ensure you properly digest and assimilate your foods, critical for keeping the mood, hormones, energy levels and immune system strongly in balance. It's time to become mindful of how and what we eat. You can get your digestive health back on track, but you need to care for this brainbox, the digestive system. Let excellent nutrients, exercise, good sleep, stress management and herbs be your medicine.

Digestive recipe



CHINESE FORMULA

This Chinese formula is reputed to be excellent for restoring strength to the stomach and promoting healthy digestion

Take half cup white rice in a flat bowl, pour enough water to barely cover the rice and let stand overnight so that water is completely absorbed by the rice.

In the morning, if there is any water left, drain it off. Put the rice in a dry frying pan and gradually heat it up until the pan is very hot. Using a spatula, keep turning the rice slowly so it doesn't burn. When it is parched dry and golden brown, put it in a glass jar and cap tightly so no moisture gets in.

Bring one cup of water to the boil, adding one teaspoon of the parched rice and a small piece of ginger root. Boil for one minute, then turn off and let stand for 5 minutes. Strain.

Take one teaspoonful once or twice a day. The Chinese claim that this remedy is especially good in cold weather as it has a warming and comforting effect on the stomach, felt throughout the entire system.

Digestive recipe



DR VOGEL'S ANGELICA LIQUEUR

Dr Vogel apparently recorded that when guests arrived at ancient monasteries of old, they would be given a glass of “Vespetro”, taking a small sip, which would have a quicker and better effect than the chemical tablets manufactured at that time. Vespetro recipes are typically passed down generation to generation. Here's how to make your own version of this digestive liqueur

- 2 oz angelica seeds
- 1.5 tsp anise seeds
- 1.5 tsp fennel seeds
- 1 slightly heaped tsp coriander seeds

Grind seeds together in a bowl and add 8 fluid ounces of pure drinking alcohol. Allow to stand for 8 days.

Once ready, strain through muslin and mix with a solution of 500g sugar (preferably organic grape sugar) dissolved in 1400ml of water.

Remember you only need a sip

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