

Digestive Support

Natural approaches to taming your tummy

by Lisa Fabians

The National Institutes of Health reports that more than 90 million Americans visit the doctor annually with digestive complaints ranging from heartburn and upset stomach to diverticulitis and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

About 40 percent of us experience digestive stress daily in the form of gas, bloating, constipation, diarrhea, cramps, acid reflux, or heartburn. What's a troubled tummy to do? Turn to natural remedies such as herbs, probiotics, and enzymes for help.

SUPPORT IS ON THE WAY

Probiotics. These “friendly” bacteria help maintain a healthy balance in our guts and promote proper digestion. Supplementing with probiotics can help treat diarrhea and intestinal infections, as well as ease IBS. Foods like tempeh, miso, kefir, and yogurt contain good bacteria such as *Lactobacillus acidophilus* and *Bifidobacterium lactis*.

Enzymes. Our bodies naturally produce these proteins, but they can weaken in quantity and strength as we age—leading to digestive troubles. Supplemental enzymes can help the body convert food into nutrients. A combination formula may contain blends such as amylase, lipase, and cellulase. Also look for plant-derived enzymes such as papain from papaya and bromelain from pineapple.

Herbs. Many herbs help intestinal healing, including cat's claw, marshmallow root, and slippery elm. Sipping tea is a convenient way to tame a troubled tummy. Anise tea is good for flatulence and nausea, cardamom for acid reduction, fennel for fatty food digestion, ginger for stimulating digestive secretions, and peppermint for an upset stomach or cramps.

Another natural remedy to try is a bitter tonic. Bitters made with gentian root can enhance digestion, absorption, and elimination. Combination formulas with turmeric, fenugreek, or chicory can also be helpful. Take 1 teaspoon of gentian bitters before you eat to stimulate digestive juice production.

Flaxseeds. As they are digested, fiber-rich flaxseeds form a gel that can help soothe an irritated digestive tract. Sprinkle two tablespoons over food daily to reduce mild inflammation and ease constipation. TFL

SELECTED SOURCES *Enzymes: What The Experts Know* by Tom Bohager (\$14.95, One World Press, 2006) ■ *Healing Herbal Teas* by Brigitte Mars, AHG (\$17.95, Basic Health, 2006) ■ *The Health Detective's 456 Most Powerful Healing Secrets* by Nan Kathryn Fuchs, PhD (\$18.95, Basic Health, 2006) ■ “Peppermint Earns Respect in Mainstream Medicine,” University of Adelaide, 4/19/11 ■ “Probiotic Bacteria: Probiotic Bacteria *Lactobacillus Acidophilus* . . . for the Symptoms of Bloating . . .” by Y. Ringel et al., *J Clin Gastroenterol*, 3/22/11

EASY LIFESTYLE REMEDY

Did you know that many digestive complaints can be solved simply by chewing your food better?

Thorough chewing mixes food with saliva and kick-starts the digestive process. Enzymes in the saliva begin to break down food and promote proper nutrient absorption.