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## Tips on Digestion



### **What is digestion?**

**Digestion** in our bodies is a complex process with many steps. It begins before we even eat, when we start preparing and cooking food. Modern life is full of stress's and distractions that disrupt this digestive process, and many of us experience digestive discomfort on a daily basis. This could be a simple case of flatulence, through to constant bloating, diarrhoea, fatigue and trouble passing bowel motions. The following gives you an outline of how the digestive process works, and some simple tips you can enhance your digestive function.

### **Cephalic phase:**

**Digestion** starts before we eat. This is called the “cephalic phase” of chemical digestion, which happens when we’re involved in the cooking or preparation of our meals. When we smell and touch food, it sends a message to our body that it’s about to receive food. This sets off signals to our digestive organs including our stomach, liver and pancreas to secrete digestive enzymes and bile to help break down food. These enzymes make our stomach the perfect environment to receive food. If we are not involved in the preparation of our food this can compromise digestion. Our body has to

work harder to secrete digestive enzymes, slowing down the digestive process and potentially causing bloating and discomfort.

**Process of digestion:**

When we chew our food thoroughly, we again stimulate our salivary glands to secrete saliva to help start to break down food. This is one of the simplest things we can do to improve our digestion.

Food moves through our body via “peristalsis”, a process by which muscles constrict and relax. It’s broken down firstly in our mouth and further in our stomach. When it reaches our small intestines the food we ate has been broken down into individual nutrients. These individual nutrients begin to be absorbed into our body and waste products are taken away.

**Food intolerance:**

Stress and anxiety are major causes of discomfort when eating. Stress sets in motion a response in the body that shuts off proper communication and blood flow, resulting in lack of appetite, indigestion, heart burn and bloating. Stress also causes inflammation throughout the digestive system that determines how effectively we process our food.

Food intolerance also causes inflammation as a defence mechanism via our immune system. This can stop our body from using the food we eat to nourish and supply it with proper nutrition. Instead causing nutrient deficiencies as our body starts to attack itself. Food intolerance symptoms are different in everyone, with symptoms ranging from headaches and bloating through to skin rashes and fatigue.

When we eat in a hurry, the food we eat arrives in our stomach too soon, which puts added stress on our body. There may not be enough digestive secretions (enzymes) to break down food. This is when digestion can be slowed, resulting in discomfort, bloating and flatulence.

**Tips to help improve digestion:**

1. Prepare your meals. Being a part of the preparation, you start to send signals to your body getting it ready to receive food.
2. Eat slowly and allow your body to digest. Slowing down and engaging in what you are doing allows proper communication between your nervous and digestive systems.
3. Eat in a peaceful environment. Instead of having the television on, listen to relaxation music or talk about something fun you did that day.

4. Eat smaller meals more often. This not only takes pressure off your body to process large amounts of food but keeps your metabolism working!
5. Avoid drinking large amounts of water prior to your meal. Water can dilute digestive enzymes, so it's best to stop drinking around 20 minutes before and after a meal.
6. If you do suffer with bloating, try having a tablespoon of apple cider vinegar half an hour before food to help jump start the digestive process. A glass of freshly squeezed lemon juice can also help as it helps detox your liver.
7. Avoid exercising vigorously after a meal as digestion is taxing on the body and blood flow should not be diverted away to your muscles from your digestion organs.
8. Choose to eat the right foods. High fat, sugar, salt or processed foods are to be avoided. Eat fresh, raw wholesome foods, free of pesticides, GM foods or foods with added chemicals. Read your food labels and Google all terms and numbers you are not sure about. The more you learn the better choices you will make for yourself and family.

If you or someone you know is suffering from digestive disturbances then book your appointment today either online on [www.nnhealth.com.au](http://www.nnhealth.com.au) or call us on 0415 517 445

We look forward to seeing you soon,

Paula