

Client: Patrick Holford
Source: Psychologies
Date: 01 January 2008
Page: 151
Circulation: 115398
Size: 268cm2
AVE: 0

Nutrition | FIVE SENSES
TUNE UP
YOUR
DIGESTION

Psychologies nutritionist
Patrick Holford gives advice
on how to heal your gut

**YOU ARE
NOT WHAT**

YOU EAT. You are what you can digest and absorb. The fundamental design of the human body is a tube – a doughnut with a hole in the middle. We, like other animals, spend our physical lives processing organic matter for waste. How good you are at this contributes to your energy levels, longevity, state of body and mind, and your digestion.

Over a lifetime, no less than 100 tonnes of food passes along the digestive tract and 300,000 litres of digestive juices are produced by the body to break it down. Our 'inside skin' – a 30ft long tract with a surface area the size of a small football pitch – is only a quarter of the thickness of a sheet of paper. Most of the billions of cells that make up this barrier are renewed every four days.

This 'inner skin' gets easily damaged. Alcohol, antibiotics, food allergens and painkillers are the most common culprits. The result is

that the digestive tract becomes more permeable. One of the theories behind food allergies is that whole food proteins, rather than broken-down amino acids, then pass through into the bloodstream, which prompts your immune system to attack. This then causes symptoms such as pain, bloating and sleepiness after eating.

You can find out what you are allergic to with a simple home test kit that measures food allergies (www.yorktest.com). Alternatively, try cutting out the most common food allergens from your diet – wheat, milk and yeast – to give your digestive system a break.

The good news is that most food allergies aren't for life. If you remove the offending items for four months, then heal the gut

(see below), you can lose your sensitivity to food.

Another way to lessen the load on your digestive system is to take a digestive enzyme with each meal (available in any health food shop). These enzymes – called protease, amylase and lipase – help digest your food. If you instantly feel better, you'll know you've got a digestion problem.

Next, try helping to rebuild your digestive tract by feeding it glutamine to nourish the rapidly repairing cells in your digestive tract. Have a heaped teaspoon every day for a month, or after any kind of infection, alcoholic excess or course of antibiotics. BioCare's EnteroGuard powder, £32.35 for 150g from www.biocare.co.uk, is designed for this purpose.

Inside your body are more bacteria than living cells. They flourish in a healthy digestive tract and die off in an unhealthy one. So, once you've improved your digestion, 'reintroducing' your digestive tract with a probiotic with exactly the right strains of bacteria could make a big difference.

Then there's maintenance. Fresh fruit, vegetables and soluble fibres found in

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oats and vegetables helps digestion, as does chewing food properly and not eating when you're stressed.



'A healthy digestive system contributes to your energy levels, longevity and state of body and mind'

30-day action plan for healthy digestion

- **Cut out the common allergens - wheat, milk and yeast - or test what you're allergic to with a York Test. Although I suggest abstaining completely, you could try reintroducing limited amounts after four months.**
- **Take digestive enzymes with each main meal and a heaped teaspoon of glutamine powder last thing at night.**
 - Consume lots of vegetables, fruit and fish; and less deep-fried food, alcohol, coffee and wheat.
- **Drink eight glasses of water every day. Dehydration is the most common cause of constipation.**
 - **To find out more, read [Patrick Holford's Improve Your Digestion](#) (£5.99, Piatkus).**