

Diet, travel, stress, illness, aging and the use of antibiotics all contribute to an imbalance or “dysbiosis” of the intestinal tract leading to gastrointestinal upset. By making a few simple lifestyle changes, you can prevent these digestive problems from occurring. For best results, combine with a healthy diet and VitaMedica’s *Probiotic-8* supplement.

- 1. Increase Your Fiber Intake.** Inadequate fiber intake is often the culprit behind constipation. Fiber helps to prevent and relieve this extremely common digestive health condition. The recommended daily intake for fiber is 25 grams for women and 38 grams for men. While soluble fiber (dissolves in water) helps lower cholesterol, in-soluble fiber moves bulk through the intestines and is responsible for keeping us “regular”. Excellent sources of fiber include whole grains, legumes, nuts & seeds, fruits, vegetables and wheat bran. To reduce the chance of getting gas, gradually add fiber to your diet and be sure to drink plenty of water. If you need to augment your diet with a fiber supplement, choose ground flax seeds instead of psyllium (e.g., Metamucil).
- 2. Eat More Fruits & Vegetables.** Fruits and vegetables are loaded with fiber, vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals – nutrients that keep your digestive system running smoothly. Fruits and veggies high in fiber include prunes, figs, oranges, pears, apples, peaches, raspberries, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, zucchini, squash and leafy vegetables like spinach. When possible, eat produce whole as the fiber content is concentrated in the skin of fruits & vegetables.
- 3. Eat More Beans, Peas & Legumes.** Due to their high fiber and protein content, legumes are nutritious, satiating and beneficial for digestive health. A wide variety of beans – kidney, white, black, garbanzo and soybeans – can easily be added to soups, stews, and salads.
- 4. Switch to Whole-Grains.** Whole grains such as whole-wheat breads, brown rice, bran and oatmeal are high in fiber. But, many prepared foods such as muffins, bagels, pasta, cookies and snacks are made with refined flour and sugar. Carefully read labels. Whole wheat, whole-wheat flour or another whole grain should be the first ingredient on the label. Look for the Whole Grains stamp which indicates that a product contains at least 8 grams per serving or is made from 100% whole grains (at least 16 grams per serving).
- 5. Add Yogurt to Your Diet.** Yogurt is milk that has been fermented with lactic acid bacteria like *Lactobacillus acidophilus*. Regular consumption of these beneficial bacteria favorably alters intestinal balance and promotes healthy digestion. Look for the “Live Active Culture” seal on the label which indicates that the yogurt contains 108 viable lactic acid bacteria per gram at time of manufacture. Choose non-fat, plain yogurt and sweeten with fresh fruit. An added bonus: regular consumption of fermented dairy products (e.g., yogurt, acidophilus milk) may help ease the symptoms of lactose intolerance.
- 6. Supplement with a Probiotic.** New technology has allowed manufacturers to add probiotics to a wide range of foods such as juices (Good Belly) soy beverages (Wild Wood) and even baby cereals (Happy Baby). But, the majority of probiotics can be found in the dairy or supplement aisle. For active people, taking a supplement is the easiest. Daily probiotic supplementation promotes healthy digestion and supports immune system function.
- 7. Watch Your Intake of Fatty Foods.** High fat meals slow digestion and can lead to heartburn, bloating and constipation. Select low-fat protein sources like fish, chicken and turkey. Replace saturated fats with polyunsaturated or monounsaturated fats. Opt for low-fat or non-fat dairy products.
- 8. Eat More Frequent, Smaller Meals.** If you eat a large meal right before bedtime, you’re more likely to experience reflux or heartburn. Instead, eat smaller meals more frequently and give your body time to digest food before hitting the sack.
- 9. Practice Safe Food Preparation.** Many foods that we associate with good health – leafy greens, tomatoes, sprouts and berries - are the most likely to contain pathogens that cause a food borne illness. The bacteria *Salmonella* is usually to blame but other bacteria, viruses and parasites are problematic. When consumed, contaminated foods can cause nausea, gas, bloating, stomach cramps and diarrhea. Practice safe food preparation by thoroughly washing all fruits and vegetables before eating. To avoid cross contamination, separate cutting boards, plates and knives for produce and meats. When finished, thoroughly wash with hot soapy water. Be aware that cooked food especially poultry that stands at room temperature for an extended period of time is at risk for food borne illness.

10. **Finish a Meal with Peppermint & Ginger.** Peppermint not only freshens your breath but helps to eliminate gas. The menthol in peppermint is believed to have antispasmodic effects on the digestive tract. Ginger is also a carminative and helps to naturally relieve gas. You can take in supplement form or eat pickled or candied.
11. **Take an Activated Charcoal or Enzyme Supplement.** A number of foods commonly cause gas such as dairy, dried legumes, some fruits (apples, bananas, melon, prunes, raisins), grains & starches, high-fat foods and certain vegetables (Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, corn, cucumber, green peppers). Other gas triggers include artificial sweeteners like Sorbitol or swallowing too much air while eating. Ultimately, gas can cause pain and cramping in the abdomen as well as belching, flatulence and bloating. Avoid trigger foods or take an over-the-counter product like activated charcoal (CharcoCaps) or an enzyme formulation (Beano) to minimize the problem.
12. **Drink Plenty of Fluids.** Dehydration is a common cause of constipation. Some beverages like coffee and alcohol further deplete the body of fluids. Aim to drink 6-8 glass of filtered water each day to lubricate your intestines and keep them functioning properly.
13. **Engage in Regular Physical Exercise.** Exercise benefits your digestive system by strengthening and toning the muscle walls of your colon. Aerobic activities like running stimulate the digestive tract by increasing blood flow resulting in stronger intestinal contractions and more digestive enzymes.
14. **Limit Your Alcohol Intake.** Drinking in moderation – defined as one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men – has some health promoting benefits. But, too much alcohol can irritate the stomach lining and relax a valve that prevents stomach acid from backing up into your esophagus.
15. **Do Not Smoke Tobacco.** Tobacco exposure has been linked to many conditions including heartburn, indigestion and cancer of the esophagus, pancreas and colon.
16. **Take Antibiotics Only When Necessary.** Antibiotics are routinely prescribed after surgery to prevent infection. They are also prescribed for a number of health conditions like acne, bacterial infections, certain fungal infections and some kinds of parasites. Unfortunately, antibiotics kill both good and bad bacteria. With increased antibiotic use, some bad bacteria have become resistant and these species can upset your digestive balance causing diarrhea. Supplementing with a probiotic helps to repopulate your GI tract with beneficial bacteria bringing balance to the microflora and reducing symptoms.
17. **Watch Medication Side-Effects.** Some medications such as narcotics cause constipation while others like antibiotics and some high blood pressure drugs cause diarrhea. Regular use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs or NSAIDs (e.g., Advil, Motrin) increases the risk of developing ulcers and other digestive problems. Before taking a medication, be sure to read prescription information.
18. **Limit Use of Laxatives.** While laxatives are useful in treating a bout of constipation, you shouldn't rely on them as this medication can make you prone to constipation.
19. **Set a Schedule for When Nature Calls.** Not going to the bathroom when you have the urge can set you up for constipation. Setting a regular time for when nature calls prevents this from occurring.
20. **Allow Time to Rest & Relax.** Stress can wreck havoc on your digestive system. An increase in perceived or actual stress causes us to release more gastric juices which can lead to gastric upset and in more extreme cases to ulcers. Learn to manage stress in your life by taking time to relax and unwind.