

Special Report

By Anna Collins, dip ION, mBANT, mNTOI

Your Top 7 Tips For Digestive Wellness

1. Beat stress!

If you are stressed or feeling under pressure this puts your body into emergency (“fight or flight”) mode. This interferes with digestion and absorption of nutrients. It will also mean you use up nutrients that are important for repair, maintenance and function of your digestive system. Regular exercise (especially outdoors), yoga, tai chi, long leisurely baths and relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and meditation are powerful tools to beat stress. Even 5-10 minutes twice a day makes a massive difference. Making sure you have enough stress-busting nutrients in your diet also plays a part.

2. Ramp up water to 2 litres a day

Sugar, tea, coffee, alcohol and salt all increase the body's need for water, causing you to become dehydrated. An adult needs several litres of fluids daily just to produce digestive secretions such as saliva, hydrochloric acid, and bile. Did you know that the lining of your digestive system (from the mouth right down through the intestines) needs plenty of water in order to function effectively, repair itself and help protect you against infections. Water, herb teas, rooibosch tea, fruit teas and even cloudy apple juice diluted half and half with water all count towards your 2 litres a day.

3. Eat More fibre rich fruit & vegetables

Did you know that people with low fibre diets are more prone to ulcers, gastritis, gallstones, colitis, Crohn's and IBS (irritable bowel syndrome)? Fresh raw fruit is both high in fibre and in bioflavonoids and in vitamins, which strengthen and protect the digestive system. Aim for 3 servings (cupfuls) of raw fruit with lots of different colours every day to ensure you get a broad range of protective nutrients. A minimum of 2 servings of green or brightly coloured vegetables a day is crucial. Dark green and red/orange vegetables in particular are rich in folic acid and beta-carotene respectively. These are essential to enable the gut to repair and maintain itself properly for long-term digestive wellness.

Your Top 7 Healthy Skin Tips

1. Drink 2 litres of water every day

Dry skin, acne and eczema and the ability to digest your food for healthy skin are worsened by simple dehydration. Pinch the skin on the back of your hand – if it does not spring back to its original position within half a second, then chances are you are dehydrated. Are you drinking enough water and minimising your intake of dehydrating tea, coffee, alcohol, salt and sugary drinks? Ideally drink most of your fluids away from meals and drink a little more if you are exercising. Clean water, herb teas, rooibosch (or rooibos) tea (which can be taken with milk) and coffee substitutes such as Barley Cup and Wake Cup count towards your 2 litres.

2. Eat more fruit and vegetables

These are rich in antioxidants and fibre, both important for skin and hair. Eating 3 servings (or cupfuls) a day of fresh raw fruit and a minimum of 2 servings (cupfuls) of vegetables is also important for boosting collagen which is crucial for strong healthy skin and hair. Potatoes, bananas and fruit juices do not count towards your 5 a day as they are high in sugars and not very high in antioxidants – a high intake of any of them could even make poor skin worse by elevating circulating glucose levels in your blood. So as to get a wide range of phytochemicals, vitamins and minerals for great skin people need to be eating a rainbow of colours every day.

3. Eat oily fish, nuts and seeds regularly

These foods are high in *essential fats* - good-for-you fats we need in our diet. Essential fats are one of Nature's moisturisers for skin. Lack of them can make skin fragile and more prone to eczema, spots and dryness and make hair lacklustre. Eating oily fish (*tinned* tuna does not count!) three times a week boosts omega 3. Munching two dessert spoons of raw hazelnuts, almonds or sunflower seeds daily raises levels of omega 6. Refined oils found in many commercial bakery goods, confectionery and ready meals and cook-in sauces block your body's ability to metabolise and benefit from healthy omega 3 and omega 6 oils. If you are very deficient you may need a supplement for 6 months as well as increasing these foods in the diet long term.

Your Top 7 Tips For Digestive Wellness...

4. Reduce gut irritants

Coffee, alcohol and the even the type of fibre in wheat can irritate the gut, causing inflammation. If you drink, say 4 cups of coffee a day, start by substituting half of them with clean water or with a coffee/tea alternative such as Barley Cup, Rooibosch or other herb tea. Instead of eating wheat bread try swapping some of this for 100% rye bread, natural unsweetened oatcakes or Finncrisp rye crackers or Ryvita, oat porridge instead of wheatabix, oat muesli or granola instead of wheat cereal for breakfast. Try some rice & millet pasta or buckwheat pasta from the health shop instead of your normal wheat pasta. Try saving your first alcoholic drink for later in the day as a way of cutting down. Another irritant for the gut is smoking, which robs you of vitamins and minerals needed to repair and maintain the gut and support digestion.

5. If it's white it's sh*te!

A refined food is a food with most of its nutrients artificially removed. For example: sugar beet (from which we make sugar) contains a beneficial cocktail of nutrients (such as betaine, folate, chromium and proanthocyanadins) that support a healthy and resilient digestive system. As beet is turned into sugar these nutrients are lost. When you eat sugar the body has to make up the shortfall, digging into its own (limited) supplies of nutrients in order to metabolise (deal with) the sugar. This causes deficiency. White flour, white rice, white pasta are just as harmful as sugar as they are also refined and we eat larger amounts of them. Refined foods rob folic acid, vitamin B5 and B6, vitamin C, selenium and zinc needed to maintain the gut.

Aim to move towards more wholefoods than refined foods. This means snacking on nuts and fruit instead of sugary snacks, eating 100% wholegrains (eg. 100% rye bread, brown rice, buckwheat, millet pasta) instead of white grains. Try using Xylitol from health stores or 100% pure stevia instead of sugar. Even swapping your small fruit yoghurt for a natural yoghurt with fruit (and if needed, xylitol) cuts up to 4 teaspoons of sugar per serving!

6. Chew your food and relax over meals

Chewing really well is important for accessing the nutrients in your food and especially helps you digest protein. Protein is important for repair and maintenance of all body tissues including the gut. Protein foods such as eggs, fish and lean meat also tend to be rich in zinc, essential for repair of the gut lining. You are not just what you eat but also what you digest and absorb.

If a meal is eaten hurriedly, at your desk or while rushing around, the stress hormones cortisol and adrenalin are elevated. These stress hormones put your body into emergency mode which shuts down or impairs digestion, which can contribute to poor nutrient absorption and even discomfort and erratic bowel function.

Your Top 7 Healthy Skin Tips...

4. Chew your food and relax over meals

Chewing really well is important for accessing the nutrients in your food, which can't be broken down thoroughly if it enters the stomach in large lumps. The stomach has no teeth so food needs to be well pulped before you swallow it. Protein in particular needs lots of chewing. The best protein comes from fish, beans, lentils, eggs, and lean meat and is essential in helping your liver function effectively to keep skin clear and problem-free. Women in particular often tend to skimp on protein in the belief it will cause weight gain. The opposite is true. Multitasking during meals elevates stress hormones that put your body into emergency mode and this impairs digestion. If you have digestive problems, they will need to be resolved so you get the full benefits of your improved diet and lifestyle. You are not just what you eat, but what you digest and absorb.

5. Kick the "nutrient-robber" habit

Refined foods include sugar, artificial sweeteners, white bread, white rice, ready meals, jar cook-in sauces, and confectionery. Refined foods are those that have had most of their nutrients and fibre removed. Eating these "foods" forces your body to use up its own supply of nutrients to deal with these "empty calories". The result is the more you eat the more depleted you become of B vitamins, magnesium and antioxidants – bad news for eczema, acne, psoriasis, wrinkles, hair quality, cellulite and more. Excess alcohol and stimulants (tea, coffee, cocoa, coke) and particularly cigarettes and street drugs also rob skin nutrients.

Aim to move towards more wholefoods than refined foods. This means snacking on nuts and fruit instead of sugary snacks, eating 100% wholegrains (eg. 100% rye bread, brown rice, buckwheat or millet pasta) instead of white grains. Try using Xylitol from health stores or 100% stevia instead of sugar. Even swapping your small fruit yoghurt for a natural yoghurt with fruit (and if needed, xylitol) cuts down sugar by as much as 4 teaspoons per serving. Try delaying your first alcoholic drink of the day till later to cut alcohol intake.

6. Beat Stress!

Stress contributes to spots, eczema, psoriasis and even hair loss. This is because it robs us of nutrients like magnesium, vitamins C and B. Prolonged or chronic stress can even inhibit the body's ability to produce the anti-inflammatory hormone cortisol. The drug cortisone, often used for conditions such as allergies and eczema, is a relative of this natural anti-inflammatory cortisol the body produces by itself.

Regular exercise (especially outdoors), yoga, tai chi, long leisurely baths and relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and meditation are powerful tools to beat stress. Even 5-10 minutes twice a day makes a massive difference. Making sure you have enough stress-busting nutrients in your diet also plays a part.

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7. Try a high potency probiotic

Around 1kg of live bacteria live in an adult gut in large colonies attached to the intestinal lining. Probiotics are “friendly” bacteria that reside in your gut. These help with digestion and (if you eat enough of the right fibre) produce butyric acid. Butyric acid soothes and repairs the gut wall and helps prevent tumours. Probiotics should outnumber pathogenic bacteria (“bad bugs”). People who have a refined diet, take antibiotics or who were not breast-fed usually have an imbalance of bacteria in the gut, with too many of the pathogenic (disease-causing) species.

Taking a probiotic supplement can be helpful and a good one will guarantee at least 8 billion live bacteria per dose. In order to achieve effects which last beyond the period for which you take the supplement, it can be necessary to do a gentle gut bacteria rebalancing programme to kill off some of the “bad bugs” and facilitate growth of probiotics.

Your Top 7 Tips For Digestive Wellness...

7. Try totally eliminating dairy products for two weeks

Skin conditions can be triggered or made worse by food intolerances or sensitivities. In particular, eating dairy foods (anything that comes from an udder) appears to be a problem for many.

Eggs are *not* a dairy food but butter, milk, cream and cheese are. Eliminating dairy (cow, goat and sheep milk) products completely involves *total* avoidance. This means avoiding unexpected dairy derivatives (eg. casein) that found in many foods, some medications, supplements and even personal care products such as shampoos and moisturisers. Anything that comes in contact with the skin is absorbed quickly into the bloodstream so it's not just what goes in your mouth that matters. NB. Milk is not the only source of calcium – ground sesame seeds/tahini, sunflower seeds, almonds, dark green leafy vegetables and organic soya tofu/yoghurt are better still.



I hope you have found these tips interesting as a starting point for achieving better skin or digestive wellbeing. You will have noticed that many of the same food and lifestyle factors affect both digestion and skin. In fact, almost all people with skin problems have digestive issues that are playing a part.

Why not start building a few new habits today? It takes 3 weeks of carrying out your new action every day to build a new habit so it becomes automatic. I am constantly delighted at the positive effects small, steady changes can have on my clients' health and wellbeing.

With best wishes,