

Digestive Health



The health of your digestive system is essential to ensure proper digestion and absorption of nutrients, as well as to support the function of other body systems, such as the immune system. The health of the gastrointestinal system, particularly the gut microbiota, even impacts mental health through its connection with the central nervous system, often referred to as the *gut-brain axis*.

The digestive system is made up of digestive and accessory organs, including the stomach, small intestine, large intestine (colon), pancreas, liver, and gallbladder, as well as various chemical compounds, such as hormones, stomach acid, bile, and digestive enzymes. The gut microbiota, a community of live microorganisms found in high concentrations in the colon, are also essential to digestion and gut health. Several lifestyle choices, such as eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, staying hydrated, managing stress, and supporting your health with dietary supplements, can help you maintain digestive wellness.

Top recommended supplements for digestive health

Probiotics

Probiotics are fermented food products or dietary supplements that contain beneficial microbes, including bacteria, bacterial spores, or fungi (yeasts). When consumed, they offer health benefits to the host, both by colonizing the gastrointestinal tract and by transient activity when passing through the body. Probiotics have been studied for their therapeutic benefits in a number of health conditions, including inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), autoimmune diseases, obesity, and mental-emotional disorders. The health benefits of probiotics can vary significantly depending on the specific strain or strains included.

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Digestive enzymes

Enzymes are substances that increase the rate of chemical reactions in the body (catalysts). Specifically, digestive enzymes are secreted by the digestive tract to aid in digesting fats, proteins, and carbohydrates consumed through the diet. Enzyme supplementation may be beneficial for individuals with food sensitivities, such as lactose intolerance, and certain gastrointestinal disorders. Enzyme supplements may include a variety of enzymes from different sources, such as pancreatic enzymes (e.g., porcine or bovine sources), plant-based enzymes (e.g., bromelain from pineapple, papain from papaya), and microbe-derived enzymes. Each enzyme breaks down a specific component of food. For example, lipase aids in the digestion of lipids and protease aids in the digestion of proteins.

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Fiber

Fiber is an umbrella term for the carbohydrates found in plant foods that resist digestion and absorption in the human small intestine. High-fiber foods include vegetables, fruit, legumes, nuts, seeds, and whole grains.

The two main forms of fiber are soluble fibers, which dissolve in water and slow transit time in the human digestive tract, and insoluble fibers, which do not dissolve in water, speed transit time in the human digestive tract, and increase fecal bulk. In addition to supporting digestion, research has shown that a high-fiber diet may reduce the risk of cancer, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and obesity.

Prebiotics, one type of soluble fiber, possess unique characteristics and health effects. Prebiotics act as a source of fuel for beneficial microbes, promoting a healthy microbial profile, and providing a number of associated health benefits. Research is increasingly confirming the numerous health benefits of prebiotics.

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L-glutamine

L-glutamine is the most abundant amino acid in the human body and is used as a substrate (material) by the small and large intestines for energy production. L-glutamine also plays a role in liver cell reproduction and energy metabolism in the liver. L-glutamine supplementation may reduce intestinal cell death that normally occurs with exposure to stress, such as intense heat and exercise. It may also benefit individuals with certain digestive conditions, such as Crohn's disease and short bowel syndrome.

Research has shown that the health benefits of L-glutamine may be attributed to its ability to modulate inflammation, protect against cellular stress and death, and regulate the reproduction of intestinal cells.

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Deglycyrrhizinated licorice

Licorice is a medicinal herb grown in parts of Greece, Turkey, and Asia. The plant's roots have laxative, antimicrobial, demulcent, antioxidant, and liver-protecting properties. An extract of licorice root, known as deglycyrrhizinated licorice (DGL), is used in the treatment of inflammatory bowel diseases, peptic ulcers, and gastric ulcers. DGL supplementation may also help improve symptoms of indigestion, such as heartburn, belching, bloating, and nausea. Clinical studies have found DGL supplements to be safe and well-tolerated.

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