

The Daily Union  
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Title: Eating for Digestive Health

## Eating for Digestive Health

Many Americans experience digestive difficulties like bloating, stomach aches, and irregularity. For many, certain lifestyle choices, including diet, may contribute to these digestive difficulties. But, did you know specific foods and beverages can play a role in digestive health?

To get started, here are a few tips to keep your digestive system running smoothly:

- **Get Your Fiber Fix:** Women ages 14-50 years of age should try to eat at least 25 grams of fiber every day, while men of the same age should aim for 38 grams. To help meet these recommendations, choose fiber-rich whole grain products, nuts, legumes, fruits and vegetables. Fortified foods and beverages including some yogurts, cereals, and nutrition bars can also be included in your diet to help increase your fiber intake and meet recommendations.
- **Stay Hydrated:** When adding fiber to your diet, be sure to increase your fluid intake as well. Fluids help keep food moving through the digestive system.
- **Probiotics & Prebiotics:** Probiotics are live cultures that have certain health benefits and are found in a variety of fermented foods, including certain yogurts, cheeses, and kefir. Prebiotics help keep probiotics alive and active and may be naturally occurring or added to foods. Not all probiotics are the same so be sure to contact your health professional for help in finding probiotic foods and supplements that are right for you.
- **Get Moving:** Focus on fitting physical activity into your day. All types of exercise, from walking and stretching to jogging, will help promote good digestive health.

Making diet changes isn't just for losing weight, it can improve many other aspects of your physical, mental, and cognitive health. People who suffer from digestive diseases must be especially diligent in protecting their digestive health. The digestive system includes our gastrointestinal tract (GI), liver, pancreas, and gallbladder. The GI tract runs from the mouth through a series of hollow organs to the anus. These organs include the mouth, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine (which includes the colon and rectum) and anus. A digestive disease can affect any one of these organs, or a combination of them.

Although there are many digestive diseases that warrant close attention to a person's diet choices, here is a brief description of some of these diseases and common diet modifications that are prescribed.

**Diverticular Disease** results in diverticulosis – a condition that occurs when small pouches, or sacs, form and push outward through weak spots in the wall of your colon. A diet high in fiber is often recommended for people who have this diagnosis. Increasing your consumption of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains will help boost daily fiber intake.

**Irritable Bowl Syndrome (IBS)** presents symptoms such as repeated pain in your abdomen and changes in your bowel movements, which may include diarrhea, constipation, or both. Eating more fiber-rich foods, along with avoiding gluten are just two common diet recommendations.

**Acid Reflux (GER & GERD)** GER in Adults occurs when your stomach content comes back up into your esophagus causing heartburn (aka acid reflux). GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease) is long lasting and more serious than GER. A change in diet that includes avoiding foods and drinks that make your symptoms worse can ease the discomfort of acid reflux.

**Crohn's Disease** is a chronic (long lasting) disease that causes inflammation and irritation in your digestive tract. Symptoms include abdominal pain, severe diarrhea, fatigue, weight loss and malnutrition. The cause of Crohn's disease is unknown and there is no known cure for the disease. Good nutrition, like with any digestive disease, is important and can help manage the effects of the disease on the body. Dietary recommendations will vary based on the symptoms you are experiencing and medications your doctor is prescribing. A special diet, such as one that is high calorie, lactose free, or low fat may be what your doctor recommends.

Working with your physician and registered dietician on specific diet changes and interventions is critical to successful treatment of any digestive disease. Different changes may help different people with a digestive disease and close monitoring by your health care team provides the foundation for improving your health.

If you are experiencing ongoing abdominal pain, fatigue, diarrhea, constipation, or any of the other many symptoms associated with digestive diseases, seek out medical help. The sooner you can identify what is causing these symptoms, the sooner your health care team can help you begin treatment. This will not only help you feel better, it will reduce the physical damage many of these diseases can cause to your body.

For more information about your diet and health, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research & Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!