



Keep Your Colon Healthy and Happy

There is a lot to be said for a happy colon. Most of us can appreciate this given our experience with constipation, diarrhea or intestinal gas. For people with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), an unhappy colon can take over their lives.

The colon (also called the large intestine) is the final part of the digestive process. Its job is to remove and recycle water and electrolytes from stool before it leaves the body. It is home to trillions of microorganisms, including bacteria and yeast, collectively known as microbiota or microflora.

I like the way Dr. Gerard Mullin, MD director of integrative GI nutrition services at Johns Hopkins Hospital puts it: the colon is the primary keeper of gut microbiota and we need to create a good home for them.

Microbiota, and especially *friendly* bacteria, are important to a healthy gut. We have a symbiotic relationship with these organisms; we need them because of their role in digestion, support of our immune system, protection from pathogens, and production of B vitamins. They might even play a role in hormone balance, obesity and the development of some diseases like celiac. We can't live without them.

One way to encourage a healthy microbiota is with probiotics. Take a supplement and/or eat probiotic-rich foods like yogurt or fermented foods (miso, kimchi, or fresh sauerkraut.)

Diet has a big impact on colon and microbiota health. Choose fiber-rich fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and cold-water omega-3 rich fish. Limit red meats and processed meats with nitrites (which are known to increase the risk of colon cancer.) Limit caffeine, which can irritate the GI track. Drink roughly 6-8 glasses of filtered water each day.



Keeping things moving is also good for gut health. The longer that stool lingers in the colon, the more time for toxins and other wastes to be reabsorbed and for unfriendly bacteria to flourish. The best prevention for constipation is a diet rich in fiber and water. Exercise also helps keep the gut moving.

Dr. Mullins warns against the use of natural products that contain the laxative herb senna, because with repeated use it can damage the nerves of the colon. Instead, he recommends magnesium citrate or magnesium glycinate daily. I think this is a good recommendation; one-a-day vitamins are typically low in this bulky mineral and it is surprisingly hard to get adequate amounts of magnesium from our diet.

Try these recommendations to keep your colon happy; it will make it much easier to live with.

Jump Start Your Exercise Program

Some of my clients have a relatively easy time changing their eating habits but really struggle with exercise. They want to do it, they know it makes them feel better, but can't get going. Even once started, it can be so easy to get derailed. Holidays, vacations or illness can disrupt the routine.

Ultimately we have to just do it. It doesn't really matter what you do; just do something. Forget about what exercise you have done in the past: where can you comfortably start now?

Start with something so easy that your response is "Oh! I can do that!" It might be walking 10 minutes a day if you haven't exercised for awhile or you have no room in your schedule. For some it will be scheduling 20 to 30 minutes a day. It might be getting to the gym once during the next week.

So often we think this slow beginning is not enough; yet the level we think we "should" be doing is overwhelming. So we do nothing. The point here is to just get started, since that is the hardest part. Once you find room for this small amount, exercise becomes part of your day. From there it has a way of expanding on its own. Next thing you know, you'll be walking longer or joining classes. You'll be enjoying movement.

It also helps to pay attention to how exercise makes you feel. Think of it as time for you, time to de-stress and take care of yourself. It's one of the healthiest habits you can develop *and* it really feels good! When you exercise, you have a better frame of mind, move more easily and think more clearly.

I've seen people who hated exercise, or hated the idea of getting up in the morning to exercise, turn into people who can't imagine life without it. If you need to get jump-started, pick something simple and just do it!

Recipes for the Month

[Baked Chicken with Whole Grain Coating](#)
[Super Easy Garbanzo Bean Masala](#)

Click the links to the recipe, or find them on my blog at

www.HealthyHabitsCoach.wordpress.com.



Are you keeping your colon happy?

There are many things you can do to avoid GI discomfort! Diet and mindful eating both play a role. To find out more: 707 431-7524 or kathy@HealthyHabitsCoach.com

Kathy Nichols: Life Coach & Registered Dietitian

Are you ready to stop dieting and looking for a way of eating that is sustainable, enjoyable and healthy?

Discover Wellness from the Inside Out!

