

- Exercise / Digestive system

Gut feeling

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Whether you're living with a chronic digestive problem or looking to push yourself farther when it comes to maintaining an optimal level of digestive health and functioning, it takes more than just food consumption to get you there.



Through active and consistent exercise you can improve your digestive system, aid in overall digestive function, eliminate toxins from your gut and maintain healthy overall body weight. All of these factors will get you on the road to maintaining a strong sense of optimal digestive health. Exercise, no matter what level you consider yourself to be, is a great way to keep your body healthy, strong, and cared for.

Poor digestion has been directly linked to reduced energy levels, irregular bowel movements, constipation, acid reflux, inadequate gut health, negative eating habits, and unhealthy weight gain. Taking care of your digestion, from the food you eat to the exercises you perform, is key to living a healthy life.

Here are top 5 picks for exercises to aid in overall positive digestive health:

Walking

Walking is one of the most positive all-around workouts for optimal health. Walking is a wonderful way to include exercise into your daily life. Brisk walking helps alleviate and eliminate various health conditions. From heart disease and type two diabetes to obesity and irritable bowel syndrome, walking helps your body move to a healthier state.

Through walking, your digestive system is activated into movement. This movement stimulates your digestive tract to contract, allowing the passage of food and waste through your intestines. This makes for more regular bowel movements and less gas and bloating throughout your gastrointestinal tract. Aim for 20 to 30 minutes of walking 3 to 5 times a week to start.

Biking

Biking is one of the most effective ways to move digestion along in your body. It is an exercise that ensures the quick movement of food through your digestive tract. Biking can also help reduce the water that is lost in your stools which, in turn, improves overall digestion. Cycling also works wonders in reducing overall belly fat, which helps to create a more effi-

cient digestive system, leading to more regular bowel movements, reduced bloating and more overall energy. Add in biking to your cardiovascular exercise regime a couple times a week as instructed by your doctor.

Yoga

Yoga is an all-around great workout for your mind, body and soul. It is an effective way to establish better mind-body balance and overall coordination. Through various poses, digestion can also be improved. Poses like downward dog, boat, child's pose, upward dog and triangle have all been proved to aim for optimal digestion.

These poses, when done correctly and over time, can increase core strength and help relax the muscles of the abdomen, leading to better gut health. There are direct ties between practicing yoga and the reduction in symptoms caused by acid reflux, bloating and stress, which is another big factor in GI issues.

Sit-ups or crunches

Abdominal exercises, like sit-ups or crunches, help keep your abdominal muscles moving. This leads to less bloat and gas build up in that area. Aim to include a core workout into your daily routine 4-5 times a week. Start with 8 to 10 repetitions and build up from there based on your comfort level and physical abilities. It is best to do abdominal exercises on an empty stomach and avoid exercising directly after eating.

Pelvic floor activation

To exercise your pelvic floor muscles, squeeze and draw in the muscles around your anus (and vagina for women) so that they feel as though you are lifting them in an upward motion. Breathe slowly in through your noses and out through your mouth as you squeeze and relax. Avoid squeezing your buttock muscles and keep your thighs and legs relaxed. This will help tighten your pelvic floor muscles.