

## Q. What can I do to improve digestion?

**A.** Gurgle, gurgle, burp, and a trip to the bathroom. If that's your normal pattern throughout the day, your stomach is trying to send you a message.

Translation: "Something's not right. I'm having a hard time digesting the food you just ate."

About 70 million people suffer from digestive problems in the U.S. And these problems show up in the form of:<sup>1</sup>

- Stomach aches
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Heartburn, and other symptoms

In some cases, chronic digestive problems can be a sign of serious health problems, and you should see a doctor. But for a lot of people, they are a result of poor diet and lifestyle habits.

Ever had one of those *I-shouldn't-have-eaten-that* moments? If it's bad enough, you might steer clear of that food for a while. But if you really want better digestive health, give your gut some love. Here are five ways to improve digestion.

**1. Eat healthy foods.** This includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds. These nutrient-dense foods support gut



health and digestion. In case you're wondering, burgers, fries, soda, and pizza have the opposite effect.<sup>2</sup>

**2. Drink more water.** Aim for 6 to 8 glasses a day. Water helps your body digest food, absorb nutrients, and make bowel movements easier.

**3. Reduce stress.** There's a direct link between your gut and your brain. When you're stressed out, your stomach can be, too. Find healthy ways to handle stress like taking a walk, meditation, or deep breathing.

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**4. Avoid red meat.** Better digestion isn't the only reason to avoid red meat. It's been linked to diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer. Research shows red meat can also damage the large intestines.<sup>3</sup>

**5. Be more active.** About 80 percent of all adults don't get enough exercise (at least 30 minutes a day).<sup>4</sup> It's a risk factor for obesity and a long list of health problems, including poor digestion. Being active helps improve gut bacteria used to digest food.

Make small changes to your diet and lifestyle habits to improve digestion, and your stomach will let you know.

### References

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