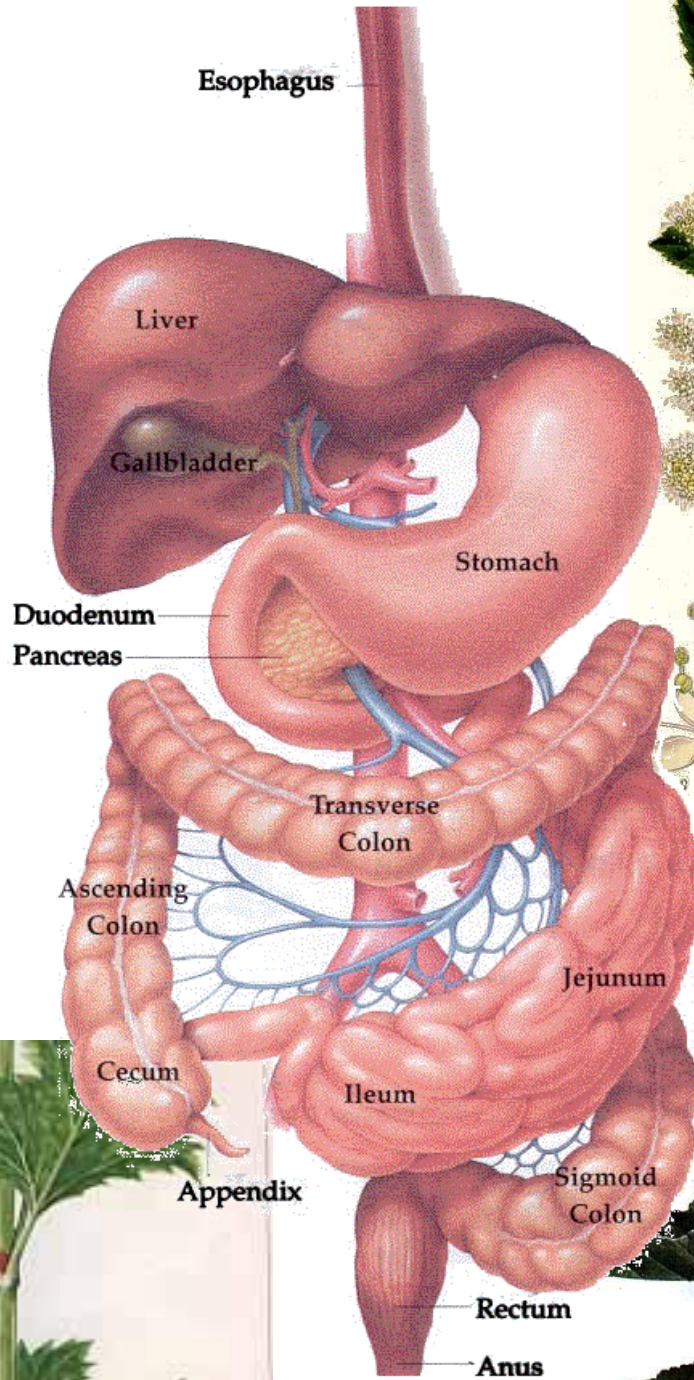


# Supporting Your Digestion with Herbs

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# GREEN ALLIES FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

## Herbal Remedies for Household Use

### What exactly makes up the Digestive System and what are its functions?

- ⊗ **Mouth** (chews, saliva starts carbohydrate and fat digestion)
- ⊗ **Stomach** (secretes hydrochloric acid and enzymes, churns and liquefies, begins protein digestion)
- ⊗ **Small Intestine** (completes protein, fat & carbohydrate digestion, main site of absorption)
- ⊗ **Colon** (reabsorbs fluids; prepares for elimination of wastes; home of much of intestinal flora)
- ⊗ **Liver** (screens all nutrient-rich blood coming from the GI for toxic material, produces bile which aids in fat digestion)
- ⊗ **Gall Bladder** (stores and releases bile into SI when needed)
- ⊗ **Pancreas** (manufactures and releases fat, carb & protein-digesting enzymes, acid neutralizing bicarbonate, and insulin)
- ⊗ **Brain** (controls appetite -- just thinking about food prepares our stomachs for food w/secretions)

### 3 ways that digestive health plays a key role in overall health:

- 1) Nourishment
- 2) Immunity
- 3) Mood

### What does it mean to have healthy digestive system?

- ⊗ **intact mucosa:** healthy mucosal cells secrete protective mucus, and digestive fluids, absorb nutrients thoroughly and prevent immune reactions by keeping pathogens and undigested food particles out
- ⊗ **healthy intestinal flora:** colonizes your gut, preventing pathogenic colonization (no weeds in the garden), feeds intestinal cells with metabolites of fiber and other foods, and educates the immune system about dealing with bacteria
- ⊗ **adequate digestive secretions:** overall, these are necessary for the process of breaking down food and liberating vitamins and minerals; hydrochloric acid kills pathogens and starts protein digestion and activates the rest of digestive process; pancreatic enzymes further digest food and help absorb fat-soluble vitamins; mucus protects stomach and intestinal lining
- ⊗ **adequate liver/gall bladder function/bile secretion:** bile is necessary to properly digest fat and to eliminate excess cholesterol; keeps bowels moving regularly (it's laxative); increases iron & calcium absorption

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- ⊗ **appropriate transit time (18-24hrs):** we need good intestinal tone and rhythmic peristalsis to make sure waste doesn't remain in the body too long (constipation) or too briefly – as you wouldn't be able to absorb everything you need (diarrhea)
- ⊗ **healthy elimination:** it's important to fully evacuate your bowels, to avoid reabsorption of toxins or bile (hard on liver), as well as to maintain appropriate fluid balance in the body

### Herbal Actions for Digestion

**Demulcents**– soothing substances that protect irritated or inflamed tissue; rich in mucilage

**Bitters** – stimulating tonics that support the digestive system through a reflex via the taste buds; best taken 15 minutes before meals

**Choleretics / cholagogues** – stimulate the production and release of bile from the liver / gall-bladder; have a laxative effect on the digestive system

**Astringents** – substances that constrict or bind tissue and therefore reduce secretions; contain tannins

**Anti-spasmodics** – relax spasms or cramps

**Carminatives** – ease the discomfort caused by bloating, cramping, and gas

**Bulk laxatives** – contain indigestible carbohydrates which stimulate bowel motility through their bulking activity

**Stimulating laxatives** – stimulate bowel motility and evacuation due to the presence of anthraquinones; only advised for short term use; may cause cramps and abdominal pain; prolonged use can result in excessive loss of electrolytes

**Mucosal tonics** – regenerate the cells that line the digestive tract

**Pungents** – warm and stimulate the digestive tract

**Anti-inflammatories** – relieve inflammation by reducing the production of inflammatory chemicals in the body

**Anti-emetics** – reduce the feeling of nausea and relieve or reduce vomiting

**Immune enhancers** – substances that boost immunity

**Anti-microbials** – substances that inhibit the survival or reproduction of microorganisms

### Health Concerns

#### Constipation

- Defined as infrequent bowel movements and often associated with the need to strain
- Can be due a lack of motility or due to intestinal spasm
- Can be also be caused by too little water or fiber in the diet

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## Herbal Remedies for Household Use

**Approach:** Improve liver function, increase stool bulk through diet and bulking herbs; improve motility; improve GI lubrication; laxatives

### **Herbal Actions / Herbs:**

- **Bitter/ choleric / cholagogue** – *Artichoke leaf (Cynara scolymus)*, *gentian root (Gentiana lutea)*, *Angelica archangelica root*
- **Bulk laxative** – *Psyllium seed and husk*, *kelp*
- **Anti-spasmodic** – *Chamomile flower (Matricaria recutita)*, *cramp bark root (Viburnum opulus)*, *wild yam root/rhizome (Dioscorea villosa)*
- **Demulcent** – *Slippery elm inner bark (Ulmus rubra)*, *Marshmallow root (Althaea officinalis)*, *Cinnamon bark (Cinnamomum spp.)*
- **Stimulating laxative** – *Yellow dock root (Rumex crispus)*, *Cascara sagrada bark (Rhamnus pushiana)*, *Rhubarb root (Rheum palmatum)*- **short term use only!!!**

### **Additional support:**

- Create regular bowel habits – respond to the urge to defecate
- Exercise regularly
- Supplement with probiotics
- Triphala – “three fruits” Ayurvedic powder / tablets – rejuvenates the digestive tract
- Fish oils

### **Herbal bowel relaxant tea recipe:**

- 1 part catnip**
- 1 part crampbark**
- 1 part fennel seed**
- ½ part hops**

In a covered saucepan, simmer the crampbark and fennel seeds in two cups of water for 10 minutes. Then remove the saucepan from the burner and add in the catnip and hops. Let the tea sit for another 10 minutes. Strain and drink, especially before bed.

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### **Diarrhea**

- Common causes: infection (viral, bacterial, parasitic), following antibiotics
- If bloody – contact a doctor as soon as possible!

**Approach:** Boost immunity, reduce mucosal damage, improve gastric acidity, reduce inflammation, and control infection

### **Herbal Actions / Herbs:**

- **Immune-enhancing** – *Echinacea root (Echinacea purpurea)*
- **Anti-microbial** – *Goldenseal root/rhizome (Hydrastis canadensis)*, *Barberry root (Berberis vulgaris)*
- **Anti-inflammatory** - *Chamomile flowers (Matricaria recutita)*, *slippery elm inner bark (Ulmus rubra)*

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## Herbal Remedies for Household Use

- **Astringent** - Agrimony aerial parts (*Agrimonia eupatoria*), Meadowsweet aerial parts (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Cranesbill rhizome (*Geranium maculatum*)
- **Pungent** - Ginger rhizome (*Zingiber officinale*), Cayenne fruit (*Capsicum annuum*)
- **Anti-spasmodic** - Chamomile flower (*Matricaria recutita*), cramp bark root (*Viburnum opulus*), wild yam root/rhizome (*Dioscorea villosa*)

### Additional support:

- Increase fluid intake
  - Avoid allergenic foods
  - Rest
  - Restore beneficial flora with probiotics
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### Indigestion / Nausea

- Can be associated with poor liver function
- Motion sickness – take herbs 1 hour before travel

**Approach:** Improve liver function, relieve symptoms

### Herbal Actions / Herbs:

- **Anti-emetic** – Ginger rhizome (*Zingiber officinale*), Peppermint aerial parts (*Mentha piperita*)
- **Bitter** – Artichoke leaf (*Cynara scolymus*), Angelica archangelica root

### Bitters Tincture Blend

Artichoke	16 ml
Ginger	8 ml
Mint	<u>6 ml</u>
	30 ml

Take 5-10 drops before meals or after meals as needed.

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### Gas /Bloating

- Signs of not digesting food properly - abdominal pain, bloating, rumbling, belching, passing gas
- Can result from eating too fast, eating with upset, swallowing air, dysbiosis, insufficient hydrochloric acid or digestive enzymes

**Approach:** Relieve gas, spasm, and pain

### Herbal Actions / Herbs:

- **Carminative** – Fennel seed (*Foeniculum vulgare*), Ginger rhizome (*Zingiber officinale*), Cardamom seed (*Elletaria cardamomum*)
- **Antispasmodic** – Chamomile flower (*Matricaria recutita*), cramp bark root (*Viburnum opulus*), wild yam root/rhizome (*Dioscorea villosa*)

### Additional support:

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- Probiotics (capsules or foods)
- Identify any food allergies
- Temporarily supplement with betaine HCl, digestive enzymes

### Kids Colic and Gas Tea

- ½ tsp fennel
- ½ tsp anise
- ½ tsp catnip or lemon balm

Simmer the herbs in 12 ounces of water for 10 minutes.  
For infants, use 1-2 dropperfuls, every ½ hour as needed.  
For toddlers, use 2 -3 teaspoons, every ½ hour.

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### Reflux

- Reflux is a condition in which stomach acid is regurgitated up into the esophagus, causing damage to the lining of the esophagus
- Involves inappropriate relaxation of the lower esophageal sphincter
- Symptoms: Chest discomfort, wheezing, asthma at night, hiccups, hoarse voice

**Approach:** protect mucosa, improve esophageal sphincter tone, and reduce inflammation

### **Herbal Actions / Herbs:**

- **Demulcent** – *Slippery elm inner bark (Ulmus rubra)*, *Marshmallow root (Althaea officinalis)*
- **Anti-inflammatory** – *Licorice root (Glycyrrhiza glabra)*, *meadowsweet (Filipendula ulmaria)*, *chamomile flowers (Matricaria recutita)*
- **Mucosal tonics** – *Goldenseal root/rhizome (Hydrastis canadensis)*, *calendula flowers (Calendula officinalis)*, *gotu kola aerial parts (Centella asiatica)*
- **Gentle bitter** – *Yarrow aerial parts (Achillea millefolium)*, *Artichoke leaf (Cynara scolymus)* – **Only use a small amount!!**

### **Additional support:**

- Don't eat close to going to bed
  - Eat slowly and relax after a meal
  - Elevate the head of the bed by 10-15 cm
  - Reduce alcohol intake
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### Food Allergies

- Common food allergens: milk products, wheat, eggs, citrus fruits and drinks, soy, corn, gluten, peanuts, food additives and colorings, refined sugars, shellfish, tomatoes

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## Herbal Remedies for Household Use

- Can cause many different symptoms: gas, diarrhea, constipation, bladder infections, respiratory problems, repeated infections, skin conditions, painful joints, headaches, depression, anxiety, hyperactivity, poor concentration, and insomnia
- Signs: dark circles and puffiness under the eyes, chronic swollen glands, and chronic postnasal drip

**Approach:** Identify and remove allergens, improve digestive function and immune function

### Herbal Actions / Herbs:

- **Bitter / choleric / chologogue** - *Artichoke leaf (Cynara scolymus)*, *gentian root (Gentiana lutea)*, *Angelica archangelica root*
- **Mucosal tonics** - *Goldenseal root/rhizome (Hydrastis canadensis)*, *calendula flowers (Calendula officinalis)*, *gotu kola aerial parts (Centella asiatica)*
- **Immune-enhancing** - *Echinacea root (Echinacea purpurea)*, *astragalus root (Astragalus membranaceus)*
- **Anti-inflammatory** - *Licorice root (Glycyrrhiza glabra)*, *meadowsweet (Filipendula ulmaria)*, *chamomile flowers (Matricaria recutita)*

### Additional support:

- Consider doing a food elimination diet for two weeks – observe if any allergic symptoms change during this time. Then slowly start to introduce the foods back into the diet and watch to see if symptoms return or get worse.
- Supplements: Vitamin C, Vitamin A, bioflavonoids (quercetin), zinc, essential fatty acids, probiotics, digestive enzymes, glutamine

## 7 Easy Ways to Support Your Digestive Health in Any Condition:

- ☼ Drink 2 glasses of quality filtered water in the morning, before coffee or tea. Drink another before going to bed. Drink plenty of fluid throughout the day (your weight in pounds, divided in half equals an ideal number of ounces to drink).
- ☼ Eat a variety of color: colorful fruits and vegetables are loaded with antioxidants, vitamins, minerals and fiber.
- ☼ Eat at least 2 high-fiber foods each day (whole grains; raw fruits with skins and dried fruits; raw or lightly cooked vegetables; nuts and seeds with skins; beans, peas, lentils; ground flax seeds).
- ☼ Chew your food well. Remember our stomachs don't have teeth! The more work we do ahead of time, the better. Try chewing each bite 15 times; work up to 30. See how you feel.







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### **Resources:**

#### **Digestive System-Specific:**

Healthy Digestion the Natural Way, D. Lindsey Berkson (great overall digestive information)

Foundations of Health, Healing with Herbs and Food, Christopher Hobbs

Nourishing Traditions, Sally Fallon (cookbook and nutritional information)

Healing with Whole Foods, Paul Pitchford (TCM nutrition, herbs, recipes)

Why Stomach Acid is Good For You, Jonathan Wright, MD (debunks stomach acid myths)

Food & Mood by Elizabeth Somer

Optimal Digestion, Trent W. Nichols, MD and Nancy Faass

#### **General Herb-Related:**

The Family Herbal by Rosemary Gladstar

The Roots of Healing: A Woman's Book of Herbs by Deb Soule

Flower Power by Anne McIntyre

The New Age Herbalist by Richard Mabey

Making Plant Medicine by Richo Cech

The Herbal Medicine-Maker's Handbook by James Green

An Encyclopedia of Natural Healing for Children & Infants by Mary Bove

#### **More Advanced Texts:**

Herbal Therapy & Supplements by Merrily Kuhn & David Winston

Medical Herbalism by David Hoffman

Principles & Practice of Phytotherapy by Simon Mills & Kerry Bone

#### **Herb Sources:**

Green Mountain Medicinals, Montpelier – good selection of bulk herbs

Rooted Wisdom Wellness Shop & School, Middlesex – full line of supplements and bulk herbs, will deliver to Montpelier

Purple Shutter Herbs, Winooski – full-service local herb store; source of high quality herbs, will ship

Avena Botanicals, ME – mail order of high quality herbal products

MountainRoseHerbs.com – mail/web order of high quality tea herbs and powders, supplies, tinctures, etc

Flower Essence Services, Nevada City, CA – for North American Flower Essences

Nelson Bach USA, Philadelphia, PA – for Bach Flower Essences (also available at most health food markets)

Floracopeia, CA – online source of organically grown and ethically harvest essential oils

Lunaroma, Burlington – full-service, local essential oil shop