

## Digestive Wellness Strengthen the Immune System and Prevent Disease Through Healthy Digestion

Elizabeth Lipski

The comprehensive reference, evenhandedly covering herbal medicines, pharmaceuticals and nutrition

This is a large book dedicated to an educated readership of people that have the background and inclination to analyze and resolve their own medical problems.

The book begins by introducing the reader to the compliments in the digestive tract. It is an extraordinarily elaborate system, made up of large areas for absorption, a circulatory system to carry nutrients to the body and wastes back, and its own almost autonomous nervous system capable of functioning independent of the brain.

A healthy digestive tract is fundamental to overall health. Moreover, seemingly unrelated problems elsewhere in the body – a fuzzy brain, migraine headaches, pains in the elbows and knees – can very often be traced back to problems in nutrition and digestion.

The next part is dedicated to the DIGIN model she refers to throughout the remainder of the book in pointing out where problems originate. The acronym consists of the following:

Digestion/absorption

Intestinal permeability

Gastric flora – the microorganisms

Immune system/inflammation

Nervous system

Intestinal permeability is a fairly recent concept. The intestine walls are designed to allow nutrients, small molecules, to penetrate and enter the bloodstream, while restraining larger molecules within the gut. When the intestinal walls don't do this job, larger bacteria and other odd stuff goes floating through the body, causing problems that don't appear related to digestion.

With this model in place, she proceeds to the theme of the book. Our bodies work when everything is in balance. We throw our bodies out of balance by taking in too much food, the wrong kinds of food and the wrong balance of foods. She is especially critical of two major industries that control our diet: the processed foods producers and the restaurant industry. They exploit our weak natures to improve their corporate profits, at the cost of our health. One of her favorite targets is the soft drink industry, filling us with sugars we don't need and acids that are hard to digest.

Balance goes beyond diet, however. Exercise is important, eliminating stress is important, and taking time to eat as well. Digestion begins in the mouth. If we don't have food that requires chewing, or don't take time to chew, the process does not get off to a good start. She reconfirms the wisdom of the home-cooked family meal, with the family saying grace as they savor the aroma, and then taking time to enjoy it.

After this well constructed lead in, she comes to the most important part of the book for most readers: how to diagnose common problems associated with the digestion and how to treat them. She provides a number of lists for self-diagnosis, but also provides detailed information on the laboratory tests that a doctor can order to confirm the suspicion. There are so many conditions and tests available that you, the patient, and the doctor are obliged to do all you can to narrow it down for you present the problem to the medical establishment for a solution.

Lipski shows a good understanding of the pharmaceuticals involved in treating digestive problems as well as herbal remedies and dietary changes. Her preference is for the latter when they will work. They are more natural, and of course less expensive. However, she makes no bones about the fact that pharmaceuticals are often required.

The most common complaint among Americans is heartburn, which now goes by the acronym GERD. She offers the very useful observation that heartburn is not a problem of excess stomach acid but rather misplaced stomach acid. As the valve meant to contain it within the stomach weakens with age, it gets up into the esophagus. The situation is exacerbated by the wrong food and drink, alcohol among the greatest offenders.

Her useful observation is that the pharmaceuticals used to treat GERD can have detrimental side effects, tickly if used over the long-term. Proton pump inhibitors, a number one profit maker for the pharmaceuticals, lower stomach acid. This treats the symptom, but a proper level of acidity is essential to digestion on the other side of the stomach. Without enough acid, the microbes from the big intestine invade the small intestine and interfere with its ability to do its job. The take-home point is that there are no shortcuts. Good health ultimately depends on a good diet, good exercise and other good habits.

She addresses a number of ailments that would not seem to be digestion related, among them migraine headaches, psoriasis, even autism. These conditions are complicated. They manifest them differently in different people, they may have some genetic basis, and they have different dietary triggers in different people. The book provides useful lists of things to look for and alternatives to try and treating such conditions.

All this is in keeping with the view of medicine that she espouses. Rather than look at the body as something that is expected to be in perfect health, and requires treatment by a physician when it is not, she takes a wellness centered approach. We, the masters of our bodies, should take responsibility for keeping them well before problems occur, and also take an active role in diagnosing and treating problems to the extent that we can. We can do this by changing our diet and lifestyle. Doctors and drugs are a necessary part of the system, but they cannot do it all themselves.

I bought this book for my wife whose digestive issues seem to be impacting her hormonal system. In reading it I learned a lot about dealing with my own issue with heartburn and our babysitter's issue with migraines. I write this review two days after having read it. I expect to come back in a year with an update with regard to how effective the advice turned out to be.