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OPINION COLUMN

Many natural defences to ward off digestion problems

Melissa Carr, 24 hours

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(FILE PHOTO)

Quit smoking, avoid lying down shortly after eating and keep a food diary to get more specific about which foods might be triggers.

Commercials showing an image of fire superimposed over the chest of a man eating his second big chili dog tells us that we can eat anything we want, provided we take their pill. While we will occasionally eat too much and choose hard-to-digest foods, some people still suffer from indigestion or heartburn even when trying to eat healthy.

According to the Canadian Digestive Health Foundation, "five-million Canadians experience heartburn at least one time per week." While Canadians received 12.4 million prescriptions for proton pump inhibitors — drugs that reduce stomach acid production — many of these sufferers are dissatisfied with the outcome of their medication.

There are, however, other options. It's essential to start with the basics and eat small amounts of food more frequently. Also, spend more time chewing food well as digestion begins in the mouth. Be mindful as you eat and focus on eating when eating, rather than multitasking mealtime with work, TV or reading. Avoid or limit foods like coffee, alcohol, citrus fruits, tomatoes, refined sugars and flour, rich and creamy foods, spicy foods, processed foods, and greasy and fried foods. Also, quit smoking, avoid lying down shortly after eating and keep a food diary to get more specific about which foods might be triggers.

If the symptoms seems to be aggravated by stress, practise some relaxation techniques like deep breathing, meditation, yoga, tai chi, or qi gong. Chamomile tea, Siberian ginseng, B vitamins and other natural supplements can help reduce the feelings of and effects of stress. And taking a 10-minute walk after each meal can both improve digestion and manage stress.

Licorice root deserves extra credit here as it is both an adrenal support (helps manage the impact of stress) and protects the lining of the stomach and esophagus, thus minimizing and treating the damage caused by stomach acid. However, because a component in it called glycyrrhizin can raise blood pressure, make sure to select deglycyrrhizinated licorice (DGL) chewables.

Acupuncture is another solution to these digestive ills. One of the most commonly employed points for stomach issues, amongst many other health concerns, is called ST36. It is found on the lower leg, one hand-width below the kneecap, just outside the shin bone. Another point is about halfway between the navel and the lower tip of the breastbone. Both points can be acupressed for a few minutes each.

With treatment and some lifestyle changes, mealtimes need not be another life stressor. Bon appetit!

Melissa Carr is a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, caring for patients in an integrative medicine clinic in Vancouver.

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Puristat Digestive Wellness

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A few helpful Do's and Don'ts of Preventing Indigestion

Avoid carbonated beverages
Avoid late-night eating
Avoid spicy foods
Do not eat too quickly
Do not lie down after eating
Drink fluids after meals, not during
Eat slowly and chew thoroughly

The good news is that for the most part indigestion is entirely preventable. With the implementation of proper dietary care, and other lifestyle changes, sufferers tend to improve rapidly.

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