

healthy LIVING

FIBRE FOR A SQUEAKY-CLEAN DIGESTIVE TRACT

There is clear evidence that a diet high in fibre has many health benefits for everyone, particularly for the health of our digestive tract.

“A digestive what?” I hear you ask.

Our digestive tract, also known as the gastro-intestinal tract, or GIT for short, is kind of like a hollow tube, if you will, that runs through the middle of your body and is responsible along with various organs for the digestion and absorption of the food we eat.

The intricate digestive process in the human body starts in the mouth as we chew our food; moves through the stomach where food is further broken down; enters the small intestine where most nutrient absorption occurs; then proceeds into the large intestine where water and electrolytes are absorbed before any undigested nutrients and metabolic wastes are finally passed out of the body.

The main organs responsible for digestion are the stomach, pancreas, liver and gallbladder. There are also many enzymes, hormones and metabolic processes that are involved.

As we are all a little unique, some of us will have a fast digestive process and some of us a slower one. We will find that there are certain foods that affect our digestive process too – some that enhance it and others that disrupt it (we tend to remember those ones more!).

However, there is clear evidence that a diet high in fibre has many health benefits for everyone, particularly for the health of our digestive tract. One of these specific benefits is the detoxification capacity of fibre.



Before we review how fibre can help, let's just look at what we mean by detoxification and how it can support your health.

Detoxification is the process of clearing and filtering toxins and wastes from the body in order to allow it to work on enhancing its basic functions. A toxin is any substance, either endogenous (from the body e.g. metabolic wastes) or exogenous (external source e.g. spoiled food) that irritates or harms the body. Toxicity occurs in our body when these wastes or toxins build up faster than we can clear them.

Symptoms of toxic build up include:

- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Constipation
- Bloating
- Sluggish appetite
- Skin problems

The digestive tract, especially the large intestine (colon) is an important channel for the elimination of wastes and toxins. Constipation or irregular bowel movements can hinder this process.

Fibre assists with detoxification by providing bulk, soft content to the stool and speeding up transit time. This helps to regulate consistency which is beneficial for both constipation and diarrhoea; it also reduces the time that waste material is in contact with the bowel, resulting in the faster clearance of toxins.

Soluble fibre further enhances detoxification by binding to toxins and wastes as it travels through the digestive tract, preventing their reabsorption into the blood stream. Insoluble fibre passes through the digestive tract virtually intact and can act like an "intestinal broom" sweeping the colon free of debris by removing toxins from the intestinal wall.

One simple step to improving bowel regularity is to consume more fibre. New Zealanders don't eat enough fibre, with statistics showing adult men eat an average of 23g daily (recommended 30g) and adult women eat 18g daily (recommended 25g). Statistics worldwide are even worse - if you're from the US or the UK, your average fibre intake is closer to 14g per day.

Fibre comes in many forms. Eating a wide variety of fresh, whole foods such as vegetables, fruit, legumes and some whole grains will help you to obtain both soluble and insoluble fibre. Fibre offers a number of benefits, not only to our digestive system, but to our overall health and wellbeing so you can look forward to a healthy bowel and a healthy life.



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