

# Nutrition News And Notes

## Five Foods For Digestive Health

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(NAPSA)—Most people don't give their digestive tract the attention it deserves. Digestive health, however, is vital to day-to-day well-being and plays a key role in long-term health. Studies show that a properly functioning GI tract ensures optimal absorption of nutrients into the body and the timely elimination of unwanted waste and harmful compounds such as carcinogens. Since the intestines produce protective immune substances, researchers are also beginning to understand the value of a healthy digestive system in boosting immune function.

When it comes to promoting digestive health, what you eat is top of the list. Here are five must-eat foods to keep your digestive health in good form.

**1. High-fiber breakfast cereal.** Bran flakes and the like are packed with insoluble fiber, the type that bulks up in your intestinal tract by holding water. This eases the passage of waste and helps prevent constipation. Not only do you feel more comfortable day to day, but avoiding constipation also means lessening your risk for developing hemorrhoids. In the long term, you may even lower your risk for colon cancer. Select cereals that supply at least six or more grams of fiber per serving. Top off your bowl with fresh fruit for added nutrition and even more fiber.

**2. Kefir (liquid-style yogurt) and yogurt.** These fermented dairy products contain live beneficial bacteria that help establish a friendly bacterial colony in your intestinal tract. Studies show that



eating foods regularly with live beneficial bacteria (called probiotics) not only helps promote good digestion but helps boost the immune system. The digestive tract contains 70 percent of the body's immune system, and if populated with harmful bacteria, the body becomes more prone to infections. When shopping for yogurt and kefir, look for live active cultures listed on the label. Aim for eating a one-cup serving daily, which also supplies about 30 percent of your calcium needs. Also reach for other foods with added probiotics such as Attune wellness bars, Vive breakfast cereal and certain cheeses if your intake of yogurt is limited. Look on the package label for bacteria names that include *Lactobacillus acidophilus* and *Bifidobacterium lactis*, which are healthy bacteria strains that help keep your digestive health optimal.

**3. Onions.** This savory vegetable, along with a few more obscure ones such as chicory root and Jerusalem artichokes, supplies a type of fiber called inulin. Referred to as a "prebiotic," inulin serves as "food" for the healthy bacteria in your intestinal tract. Studies with inulin show that

digestive health is improved by promoting more regular bowel movements. Also, the absorption of certain nutrients, such as calcium, is boosted with inulin as part of the diet. Use onions in soups, stews, stir-fries and egg dishes. Fresh, frozen and even freeze-dried onions all contain inulin.

**4. Beans.** Whether black, white, navy, pinto or kidney, these powerhouse foods should make a regular appearance in your diet for excellent digestive health. Beans are not only a super source of insoluble fiber but also of the soluble type, which has many health benefits as well. Soluble fiber helps control the rate that stomach contents empty into the intestinal tract, which in turn aids the rate of nutrient delivery into your body. Research on soluble fiber suggests this steadier flow of nutrients may help control diabetes and other chronic ailments. Use canned beans over salads and in burritos, soups and casseroles.

**5. Water.** Your digestive tract needs ample fluid throughout the day for optimal digestive health. Each day, about seven liters of fluids are used to mix with the food you eat during the digestive process. This allows the nutrients from your food to make their way into the circulation to be used by the body. Also, along with fiber, fluids, both with meals and in between, help move food through the intestines. Aim for 10 to 14 cups of fluids throughout the day, more during the warmer months, as several additional cups of fluid may be lost to perspiration.

Keep these tips in mind and you may find you can keep your digestive system in good working order for a longer, healthier life.