

The Wellness News

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Common Digestive Disorders

A nutritious diet is an important part of a healthy lifestyle, but suffering from a gastrointestinal (GI) disorder can present an entirely different set of nutritional challenges. How much fiber should someone with irritable bowel syndrome consume? How does someone with celiac disease fit whole grains into his or her daily diet? What foods should a GERD sufferer reduce or even cut out completely? Here we will cover three of the most common GI disorders and some common dietary and lifestyle recommendations.

Celiac Disease

What is it?

Celiac disease is a genetic digestive disorder thought to affect around 1 in 250 Americans. People who suffer from celiac disease are unable to digest gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, and barley. When a person with celiac disease eats something with gluten in it, the immune system responds by breaking down villi, the small protrusions located in the small intestines which help the body absorb nutrients. This loss of villi leads to decreased nutrient absorption, and over time can result in malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies. Symptoms vary from person to person but can include bloating, diarrhea, and abdominal pain.

Lifestyle Recommendations

Although celiac disease can be serious, it is fairly easily managed by cutting gluten completely out of the diet. Because gluten is found in wheat, a very common whole grain, some celiac sufferers are hesitant to include any whole grains or other

carbohydrates in their diet. Severely limiting this food group can be problematic as whole grains, provide all sorts of essential vitamins and minerals. Fortunately, there are plenty of wonderful whole grain sources that do not contain gluten and provide healthful nutrients. These include brown rice, wild rice, corn and popcorn, corn tortillas, buckwheat, quinoa, flax, millet, soy flour, potato flour and bean flour.

It is important to check food labels to make sure the product is completely gluten free and that the product was not made in the same place as other products containing gluten.

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)

What is it?

GERD is a chronic digestive disorder that occurs when the lower esophageal sphincter does not close properly, allowing stomach acids, bile and sometimes food to rise up and irritate the esophagus. Although most people will experience this acid reflux at some point in their lives, it is only considered GERD when this incident occurs more than twice per week. Symptoms include a

Although these suggestions can help alleviate general symptoms for the specified conditions, it is important to consult a doctor, a registered dietician, or another health expert for a professional diagnosis and personalized recommendations.

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burning sensation in the back of the throat, mid chest, or mid abdomen. GERD left untreated can lead to serious damage and deformation of the esophagus and in extreme cases, esophageal cancer.

Lifestyle Recommendations

Following are some steps that you can take to ease the symptoms of the condition.

Maintain a Healthy Weight: Extra pounds can put added pressure on the mid section, pushing on the stomach and causing stomach contents to back flow into the throat. Losing excess weight or maintaining a healthy weight can reduce stomach strain and, as a result, GERD symptoms.

No Smoking: Not only can smoking further irritate a damaged esophagus, but it can also affect the normal functioning of the lower esophageal sphincter. Quitting smoking can alleviate some of the acid reflux.

Avoid Common Triggers: Acid reflux triggers can vary from person to person. However, some foods such as alcohol, caffeinated drinks, chocolate, citrus fruits, fatty or fried foods, garlic and onions, mint varieties, spicy foods, and tomato based foods seem to trigger symptoms more than others.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

What is it?

IBS is a GI disorder that affects the functioning of

the large intestine, causing food to travel either too slowly or too quickly through the intestines. Nearly 1 in 5 Americans have IBS symptoms, which include cramping, bloating, constipation, diarrhea, gas and general abdominal pain. The severity of symptoms varies from person to person, with the majority of people finding they can control their IBS symptoms through stress management and a healthy diet. Severity of symptoms can also change over time.

Lifestyle Recommendations

Contrary to popular belief, certain foods do not cause IBS, but they can aggravate the condition. Here are some helpful strategies for managing and preventing IBS symptoms:

Keep a Food Journal: As trigger foods vary from person to person, keeping track of what foods seem to cause the most distress can help you make necessary changes to your diet. It is also helpful to bring the journal to a consultation with your doctor so he or she can properly diagnosis your condition.

Eat small frequent meals: Empty stomachs and stuffed stomachs both seem to be prone to IBS symptoms. Eating smaller, regular meals prevents overeating, while still keeping the stomach from being too empty.

Avoid Problem Foods: Some common problem foods to keep track of include caffeinated beverages, high fat or fried foods, lactose found in dairy products, sugar-free sweeteners, and crustaceous vegetables, such as broccoli or cabbage and alcohol.

Experiment with Fiber

Depending on IBS symptoms, fiber can help alleviate some of the aggravation, especially constipation. However, it can also exacerbate gas and diarrhea. Slowly adding fiber into the diet at the rate of 2-3 grams each day can reduce the risk of increased gas. Dietary fiber recommendations are 25-35 grams per day. Try fiber sources such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.



Call Your Health Coach for More Information 1-800-433-2320